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INTRODUCTION

The word *fantasy* goes back to the 14th century: it derives from the Old French *fantasie*, via Latin from the Greek *phantasia* with the meaning of 'imagination', 'appearance', later 'phantom', from the verb *phantazein* 'make visible'.[1] Nowadays the term *fantasy* tends to be used to refer to a literary genre, modern fantasy, usually compared with science fiction. Nevertheless, if this last narrates events with scientific and technical consistence, fantasy fiction, as its etymology could suggest, is about stories born from the imagination of unbelievable adventures, whose protagonists wander in the most incredible countries, meeting terrible creatures and finding numerous magical objects. The English writer, poet, philologist, and university professor J.R.R. Tolkien would not be satisfied by the common definition of the term *fantasy* that links it with children's literature and unrealistic tales. For him imagination was a noble sub-creative art, a matter of invention and creation, but also a way to recount a different reality, a glimpse of other worlds. In his essay *On Fairy-stories* Tolkien explained what *fantasy* means[2] using a philological approach, a subject for which he had a real passion. To include the many facets of the term *fantasy* in one definition may be a hard work. An attempt can be made merging in it the different meanings of the word *gód spell*: in Old English, it meant 'good story', then it endured in Modern English as *spell*, from which comes *Gospel.*[3] In the same way, a good fairytale should contain a good story (*gód spell)*, magical power (*spell*), and a fair share of truth (*Gospel*).

[1] "fantasy | phantasy, n." OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/68119. Accessed 17 May 2018.
[2] J.R.R. Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, London: HarperCollins, 2014, p. 28.
[3] "gospel, n." OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/80175. Accessed 17 May 2018.

Tolkien's peculiarity as a writer comes indeed from his philological competence and his endless fascination for languages. He invented, or rather, in accordance with the original Latin word *invenire* ('to come upon')[4], he found Middle-earth starting from its language. In his *Letter 165*, he wrote, "the invention of languages is the foundation. The 'stones' were made rather to provide a world for the languages than the reverse. To me a name comes first and the story follows".[5] It is not surprising that the idea of his most famous novels came not from the story itself but from the invention of Quenya and Sindarin, his own Elvish languages. Thanks to the success of his fantasy fictions, Elves, Dwarfs, and Trolls are well known in the 21st century, even if not everyone knows that these creatures lived in much more ancient times, through myths, legends and folklore, before being trapped in today's films and books. In the outward form of fantastic novels, Tolkien's works *The Hobbit* (1936), The *Lord of the Rings* (1954-55) and his mythopoetic *The Silmarillion* (1977), recall Nordic myths and sagas such as the Finnish *Kalevala*, and the Old Norse *Poetic Edda*. Obviously, knowing how Tolkien worked, the first evidence comes from the names of places and characters of his universe: the term Middle-earth summons Miðgarðr from Norse mythology, just like Mirkwood Myrkviðr, and all the dwarfs of the House of Durin hold names of the list the Vǫlva made for Odin in the *Vǫluspá*, the first poem of the *Poetic Edda*.

Philology was both a great influence and a firm base for Tolkien's universe. It mixes the study of languages with the analysis of literatures to reach ancient and lost stories of people long gone. As the study of Gothic could clarify many of the Goths' customs, only

[4] "invĕnĭo, tr. v."*, Online Latin Dictionary*, Enrico Olivetti, Olivetti Media Communication, 2003, https://www.online-latin-dictionary.com/latin-english-dictionary.php?lemma=INVENIO100, Accessed 17 May 2018.

[5] *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien,* edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, Letter 165, p. 232.

an accurate analysis of Tolkien's language, starting with little and mysterious words such as *hobbit,* could bring new light to his works. This thesis has the aim to go over literary and linguistic aspects so as to re-read Tolkien's novels with a philological approach. The following chapters will try above all to analyze the term *fantasy*, then to present Tolkien as a writer and philologist, and finally to supply an appropriate guide to Middle-earth analyzing it in a way that probably Tolkien himself would have wanted.

1 – DEFINITIONS OF THE TERM FANTASY

In the introduction of his *A Checklist of Modern Fantastic Literature* E.F. Bleiler writes:

> If anyone were to ask me what is meant by the term 'fantasy', I fear that I would have to admit my ignorance. A year or so ago I would have had no difficulty answering, but the compiling and reading involved in the preparation of the Checklist has forced me to realize that fantasy may be almost all things to all men. I have often wished that the subject of this book were something with an objective reality, such as minerals or plants.[6]

Apparently, to try to express what *fantasy* is could be an ambitious and disastrous experiment, which would not lead to any satisfying definition.

Colin N. Manlove in his essay, originally part of *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies*, defined *fantasy* as "a fiction evoking wonder and containing a substantial and irreducible element of supernatural or impossible worlds, beings or objects with which the mortal characters in the story or the readers become on at least partly familiar terms"[7]. Therefore, in the first place, fantasy is fiction. The purpose of a good fantasy novelist should be to increase the verisimilitude of the story, leaving an imprint on our imagination of an authentic and real world, but far away from our reality. Continuing to analyze Manlove's definition, fantasy evokes wonder. It implies mystery and marvel, granted to the genre thanks to the presence of the "substantial and irreducible element of supernatural or impossible worlds, beings or objects".[8] A fantasy novel is therefore characterized by the use of magic and other supernatural powers, in no way possible in our reality. This peculiar feature distinguishes the genre from science fiction, in which the story is not set in a different

[6] E. F. Bleiler, *A Checklist of Modern Fantastic Literature*, quoted by David Sandner in *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader,* Westport: Praeger, 2004, p. 156.
[7] Colin N. Manlove, *Introduction to Fantasy*, quoted by David Sandner in *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader,* Westport: Praeger, 2004, p. 157.
[8] ibidem.

universe, the events described could happen, situations could exist, whether now or in the future. Fantasy, on the other hand, distances itself from contemporaneity and future, and contemplates the past, particularly Christian worlds in a medieval order. Among these admirers of ancient time there was Tolkien, (because his novels were set in an imaginary and ancient world, they were repeatedly labelled as literature of unreality, and defined by numerous critics as escapist).[9] At the end of his definition, Manlove claimed that fantasy recalled in the reader something *partly familiar.*[10] Therefore, as indicated by C.W. Sullivan in his article *Folklore and Fantastic Literature,* "fantasy and science fiction authors use traditional materials, from individual motifs to entire folk narratives, to allow their readers to recognize, in elemental and perhaps unconscious ways, the reality and cultural depth of the impossible worlds these authors have created".[11] The wonder contained in fantasy novels is not simply strange and marvellous; the mortal characters establish a relationship with the superhuman elements and creatures, and this contact between natural and supernatural order is central. This feature makes it possible to distinguish fantasy from horror stories, in which the non-human elements remain alien, in order to induce shock in the reader. Of course, even fantasy is characterized by terrifying monsters and situations, but they match with equally good powers that usually work on people's side.

In the 18th century a critical debate between novel and romance started to emerge. By definition the novel was a picture of real life of the times in which it was written, while

[9] Leonard Jackson, *Literature, Psycchoanalysis, and the New Science of the Mind,* quoted by Tom Shippey in *The Road to Middle-earth,* London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 370.
[10] Colin N. Manlove, quoted by David Sandner in *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader,* Westport: Praeger, 2004, p. 157.
[11] C. W. Sullivan III, *Folklore and Fantastic Literature*, Western States Folklore Society, Vol. 60, No. 4 (Autumn, 2001), p. 1, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1500409, Accessed 17 March 2018.

the romance referred to works with unnatural characters, remote places, and mysterious and supernatural experiences, including therefore the fantasy genre. The English writer Samuel Johnson supported the novel stating that "the works of fiction with which the present generation seems particularly delighted, are such as exhibit life in its true state, diversified only by accidents that daily happen in the world. […] it is therefore precluded from the machines and expedients of heroic romance, and can neither employ giants to snatch away a lady from the nuptial rites".[12] With these words Samuel Johnson removed fantasy from the literature of entertainment of his generation. Unluckily for Johnson, romance was not suppressed by the realism of the novel, in part because of the increasing interest for human mind and imagination as links to the *sublime*. John Dryden, an English writer and literary critic, writes in his *Dedication to King Arthur* (1691) "fairy kind of writing […] depends only upon Force of Imagination"[13]. Taking inspiration from Dryden's assertion, years later the writer Joseph Addison, in his essay *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (1712), pointed out the power of imagination defining the sublime as its effect: "our imagination loves to be filled with an object or to grasp at anything that is too big for its capacity. We are flung into a pleasing astonishment at such unbounded views and feel a delightful stillness and amazement of the soul at the apprehension of them".[14] Pleasing astonishment, delightful stillness and amazement of the soul are indeed effects of the *sublime*.

Nowadays fantasy persists in a large number of works, not only as literature, but also as films and series with the coming of new media. Even though a lot of essays and articles

[12] Samuel Johnson, *Rambler No. 4*, London: J. Payne, 1752, pp. 142-43.
[13] John Dryden*, Dedication to King Arthur*, quoted by David Sandner in *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader,* Westport: Praeger, 2004, p. 8.
[14] Addison Joseph, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, quoted in *Criticism and Literary Theory,* Northbrook: AHM, 1975, p. 142.

about *fantasy* have appeared thanks to the recent popularity of the genre, many critics and writers are still trying to find a proper definition to the term. Tolkien was one of them to venture upon this challenge with his essay *On Fairy-stories*.

1.2 – ON FAIRY-STORIES

"I propose to speak about fairy-stories, though I am aware that this is a rash adventure. Faërie is a perilous land, and in it are pitfalls for the unwary and dungeons for the overbold".[15] With these words, Tolkien started his essay in 1938, while he was working on the first part of *The Lord of the Rings.* In it Tolkien gave his definition of fairytale, providing also a guide to all the writers who wanted to start creating their own fantasy world. *On Fairy-stories* was also Tolkien's device to institute a number of proper rules to judge fairytales, hoping that the critics of his works would take account of it. At the beginning of the essay, he anticipated its structure posing three main questions: what are fairy stories, what is their origin, and what their effects and purposes? To answer the first question, Tolkien, as a good philologist, started from the origin of the word. In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term fairytale is recorded since the year 1750 and it defines (a) a tale about fairies, or generally a fairy legend; (b) an unreal or incredible story; (c) a lie.[16] Tolkien's judgement on this definition is clear: "you will turn to the *Oxford English Dictionary* in vain".[17] Fairytales are not stories about fairies, but stories about Faërie, the perilous realm itself. Faërie contains many more things than just elves and fairies; it contains lands with their own flowers, trees, birds and other creatures; Faërie is made of wide fields, high mountains, limitless seas, a bright sky with stars, moon and sun, and

[15] J.R.R. Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, London: HarperCollins, 2014, p. 27.
[16] "fairy tale, n. and adj." OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/67750. Accessed 17 May 2018.
[17] J.R.R. Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, London: HarperCollins, 2014, p. 28.

everything else people can imagine. Imagination is essential. The human mind is naturally capable to form mental images of things that are not actually present. This faculty of image making is called Imagination, and it works through the incredible device of human language. It is curious to notice that the word *fairy* derives from Middle English *fairie,* 'fairyland', also 'something incredible or fictitious', from Old French *faerie*, 'enchantment, magic, sorcery' (12c.), from Latin *fātā,* plural form of *fātum,* 'fate', but also from the Proto-Indo-European root *bha- 'to speak, tell, say'.[18] It points out the relationship between *fairy* and words: in the same way a magician creates spells and charms by the use of words, people saying *fairy* can create it in their imagination. The word influences their thoughts, according to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which states that the structure of a language greatly influences the modes of thought of the culture in which it is spoken. Humankind comes to perceive and relate to its world by naming things, and by establishing a connection between words and objects. However, just to imagine a *fairy* is not enough. A good storyteller should make that *fairy* credible; when they succeed, they create Art, good stories and incredible worlds. Obviously, every world needs a creator, or, in this case, a *sub-creator*. Tolkien in his essay talked about *sub-creation* as the skill to create a Secondary World.[19] Inside it, what the storyteller narrates is 'true', according to the laws of that world. Though quite close to the Primary World, Secondary World is strictly divided from it and works in a total different way. When a human mind manages to enter a Secondary World, it leaves the Primary World and its rules. Here fantasy acts as a form of Art that produces Secondary Belief, willing suspension of disbelief. The moment disbelief arise, the spell is broken and Art has failed.

[18] "fairy, n. and adj." OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/67741. Accessed 17 May 2018.
[19] J.R.R. Tolkien*, On fairy-stories*, London: HarperCollins, 2014, p. 52.

The enjoyment of a story depends on the belief that such things can happen, or have happened, in real life. A good author should therefore create a consistent world. In Tolkien's novels nothing is useless or without purpose; no detail is left behind or not clarified; the secondary Belief is supported by songs, legends and tales of Middle-earth transmitted by Tolkien's characters themselves, creating thus a historical depth equal to that contained in old epic sagas.

Readers of *The Silmarillion* could recognize an act of sub-creation in Aulë's conception of the Dwarfs: "I desired things other than I am, to love and to teach them, so that they too might perceive the beauty of Eä, which thou hast caused to be".[20] To create is a natural human desire.

Coming back to the three main questions Tolkien placed in *On Fairy-stories*, what is the origin of fairytales? Tolkien answered "to ask what is the origin of stories (however qualified) is to ask what is the origin of language and of the mind".[21] Fairy stories can be found wherever there is language: through it they were invented, spread (Tolkien preferred to call the phenomenon 'borrowing in space'), and become heritage of humanity ('borrowing in time'). In 1851, Sir George Dasent wrote in the introduction of his translation of Asbjörnsen and Moe's collection of Norse fairy-tales "we must be satisfied with the soup that is set before us, and not desire to see the bones of the ox out of which it has been boiled"[22]. Tolkien was touched by these words and rephrased Dasent's image in his essay.[23] He conceived the metaphor of the Cauldron of Story, according to which the ingredients, namely legends and stories, simmer over the fire of human imagination,

[20] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, ch. 2, p. 43.
[21] J.R.R. Tolkien, *On fairy-stories*, London: HarperCollins, 2014, p. 38.
[22] Sir G. W. Dasent, *Popular Tales from the Norse*, Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1993, p. 20.
[23] J.R.R. Tolkien, *On fairy-stories*, London: HarperCollins, 2014, p. 39.

forming the final Soup, the tale as it is told. To look for proofs and sources is not useful as to analyze and to judge the story itself, the Soup as it is served: "it doesn't matter since it will all go back to an inventor somewhere in some time, and the important thing is the effect the stories have now on those who read them".[24] Coming to the third question, what are the effects of stories and their purposes? According to Tolkien, they are three: Recovery, Escape and Consolation. Recovery indicates instead the act of retrieving something lost; Escape expresses the quality of fantasy novels that offers the possibility to the reader to escape from one world to another. About this last effect, Tolkien wanted to point out with another metaphor the difference between the Escape of the Prisoner and the Flight of the Deserter: "Why should a man be scorned, if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home? Or if, when he cannot do so, he thinks and talks about other topics than jailers and prison-walls? The world outside has not become less real because the prisoner cannot see it".[25] In the 18th century, people tried to escape the polluted world of the Industrial Revolution, which with its noise, stench, and monotony, destroyed the boundary between humans and nature, wiping out the rural society with its delirious run toward the future. Under these circumstances, the only way to come back to a world free from turbulent machineries was 'to escape from the prison'. Very different is the Flight of the Deserter; with this term Tolkien referred to what critics usually analyzed as the escapist function of literature, in connection with its useless entertainment.[26] He underscored that to escape is natural behavior of humankind: since ever people struggled to escape poverty, hunger, thirst, and pain; nevertheless, the strongest and oldest desire of humankind is to escape death. In fairytales many characters

[24] Douglas A. Anderson and Verlyn Flieger, in the introduction to *On Fairy-stories,* London: HarperCollins, 2014, p. 11.
[25] J.R.R. Tolkien, *On fairy-stories*, London: HarperCollins, 2014, p. 69.
[26] Id., p. 69.

are spirits and creatures who know no death, and it should not surprise us why people write these stories. If elves could write tales about humans, they would probably be full of attempts to escape deathlessness. The last purpose of fairy stories is Consolation. It is given by the joy of a happy ending, though not so easily gained. All popular fairytales have a happy conclusion; if not, the story ends with a catastrophe and turns into tragedy. Tolkien stated that if we add the Greek prefix *eu* (which means *good)* to the word 'catastrophe', we obtain the word *eucatastrophe*, a good catastrophe.[27] In fairytales it does not imply the lack of sorrow and failure, but it denies the universal final defeat, in the same way as an evangelical revelation. At the end of his essay, Tolkien inserted a poem, written for anyone who saw fairytales just as an unrealistic lie, something created only to please children:

> Dear Sir,
>
> Although now long estranged,
> Man is not wholly lost nor wholly changed.
> Dis-graced he may be, yet is not de-throned,
> and keeps the rags of lordship once he owned:
> Man, Sub-creator, the refracted Light
> through whom is splintered from a single White
> to many hues, and endlessly combined
> in living shapes that move from mind to mind.
> Though all the crannies of the world we filled
> with Elves and Goblins, though we dared to build
> Gods and their houses out of dark and light,
> and sowed the seed of dragons- 'twas our right
> (used or misused). That right has not decayed:
> we make still by the law in which we're made.[28]

People have conceived not only elves; they have imagined spirits, gods and have worshipped them. "Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and

[27] J.R.R. Tolkien, On fairy-stories, London: HarperCollins, 2014
[28] J.R.R. Tolkien*, The Tolkien Reader*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1966, p. 54.

likeness of a Maker",[29] and certainly Tolkien, as a good Catholic, did not want to insult his Maker.

[29] J.R.R. Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, London: HarperCollins, 2014, p. 66.

2 – J.R.R. TOLKIEN: BIOGRAPHY OF A YOUNG PHILOLOGIST

Arthur Reuel Tolkien and Mable Suffield were married in Cape Town, South Africa, on 16 April 1891, and just a year after Arthur sent a letter to Birmingham.

> My dear mother,
>
> I have good news for you this week. Mable gave me a beautiful little son last night (3 January). […] It has beautiful hands and ears (very long fingers) very light hair, 'Tolkien' eyes and very distinctly a 'Suffield' mouth. […] The boy's first name will be John after its grandfather, probably John Ronald Reuel altogether. Mab wants to call it Ronald and I want to keep up John and Reuel.[30]

His relatives, close friends, and later his wife, called him Ronald; people less close to Tolkien addressed him as J.R.R.T., and perhaps these initials were the best representation of the English philologist. John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was christened in Bloemfontein Cathedral on 31 January 1892. His life at Bank House was quite ordinary. Tolkien's connection with animals, plants and fairy was evident since his childhood. Arthur had in the garden small groves of firs, cedars, and cypress, which probably were primary cause of Tolkien's deep love for trees. Mable once wrote to her husband's mother, "Baby does look such a fairy when he's very much dressed-up in white frills and white shoes. When he's very much undressed I think he looks more of an elf still".[31] On 17 February 1894, Mabel gave birth to Ronald's little brother, Hilary Arthur Reuel. At the age of two, the elder appeared strong, with light hair and blue eyes, so that his father used say about him he looked 'quite a young Saxon'.[32] However, teething made the child feverish and the weather in South Africa was not the greatest, because the heat was harming his health. At the beginning of April 1895, Mable took the two children and came back to Birmingham,

[30] Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: a Biography*, London: HarperCollins, 2002, p. 26.
[31] Id., p. 27.
[32] Id., p. 28.

where her family had a tiny house. Arthur had to stay in Bloemfontein to work. Ronald kept one only clear memory of his father: the image of him painting 'A.R. Tolkien' on the lid of family trunk. In November, Arthur contracted rheumatic fever, and on 15 February 1896 a severe hemorrhage brought him to death.

After her husband died, Mable realized that she and the boys could have not been at her parent's home forever, so she started looking for a cheap accommodation. By the summer of 1896, they moved to a row cottage at Sarehole. This move influenced a lot Ronald, who found himself in the English countryside just when he was beginning to develop his imagination. He and Hilary ventured a lot to explore the landscape in many directions, and met various inhabitants; the older brother used to call the miller with white dusty clothes and sharp-eyed face 'White Ogre', and the farmer who once chased Ronald for picking mushrooms 'Black Ogre'. They also met Dr. Gamgee (Warwickshire dialect word for 'cotton wool')[33], a man who invented 'gamgee-tissue', a surgical dressing made from cotton wool. Through these lands, many were Tolkien's adventures.

Beside fun, another part of Ronald's daily routine was dedicated to education. Mable taught him how to read and write; *Alice in Wonderland*, Arthurian legends, and George Macdonald's books amused him. However, his favourite book was Andrew Lang's *Red Fairy Book*, a story set in an unknown North, where Sigurðr defeated the dragon Fáfnir. These creatures charmed the young Tolkien, who years after claimed "I in my timid body did not wish to have them in the neighbourhood. But the world that contained even the imagination of Fáfnir was richer and more beautiful, at whatever cost of peril"[34]. When Ronald was about seven, he started writing his own story about dragons. Early on Mable

[33] Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: a Biography*, London: HarperCollins, 2002, p. 37.
[34] J.R.R. Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, London: HarperCollins, 2014, p. 55.

introduced her son to Latin. Ronald showed instantly an aptitude for languages; the sound and shape of words fascinated him, as much as their meanings. After Latin, Tolkien learnt French, but he did not like it so much, for no reason in particular. He was good at drawing too, especially plants and trees. Just as much as he loved drawing trees, he enjoyed climbing them, and sometimes even talking to them. Years later Tolkien used the Old English terms *ác*, 'oak', and *beórc*, 'birch', in a personal symbolic way to represent two schemes of education, one which preferred modern literature, the other, introduced by Tolkien to Leeds, which included in the curriculum philology and Old English.[35]

A significant event in Tolkien's childhood was his mother's conversion to Catholicism, which caused the wrath of both her family and the Tolkiens. Nevertheless, Mable was obstinate and had faith in her new religion, so that, against the families' will, she educated Ronald and Hilary to Catholicism. In September 1900, the elder son passed the examination to enter King Edward's, his father's old school; but his house was far from it, and Mable realized they needed to move nearer. She left the cottage and moved with the boys to Moseley. Tolkien, looking back in old age, recalled these four years in the hamlet of Sarehole as "the most formative part of my life"[36]; instead, the Moseley small house remained in his memories as "dreadful"[37]. Fortunately for Ronald the house at Moseley had soon to be demolished to build a fire station, so that he and his family had to move again. Mable found a new house next to the New Roman Catholic Church of St Dunstan, backed on the railway of King's Heath Station. There the young Tolkien had his first approach with the Welsh language. Senghenydd, Nantyglo, Baen-Rhondda,

[35] Michael D. C. Drout, *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2007, p. 679.
[36] Humphrey Carpenter*, J.R.R. Tolkien: a Biography* London: HarperCollins, 2002, p. 42.
[37] *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien,* edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, Letter 340, p. 463.

Tredegar, and Penrhiwceiber, were the old names on the coal-trucks that he did not even know how to pronounce, but which immediately caught his attention: "he knew that here were words more appealing to him than any he had yet encountered, a language that was old and yet alive"[38]. However, Mable did not like that location, and not even the St Dustan church, so she decided to move again. She found a house in the suburb of Edgbaston, next door to the Grammar School of St Philip, which had lower fees and was under the direction of the Birmingham Oratory. Now aged ten, Ronald was enrolled at St Philip in 1902. Nevertheless, Mable realized that the academic standard of the school was not the same as King Edward's; Ronald came back to his old school in autumn 1903, as soon as he won a Foundation Scholarship. There he was placed in the sixth class, and began learning Greek: "the fluidity of Greek, punctuated by hardness, and with its surface glitter captivated me. But part of the attraction was antiquity and alien remoteness (from me): it did not touch home"[39]. About Shakespeare, he discovered he "cordially"[40] did not like him so much. However, another author was closer to his taste: Ronald knew how to recite Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in the original Middle English.

Because of his journey from South Africa and the wanderings of Mable, Ronald felt homeless and rootless; the whole West Midland area became his true home. He once wrote, "Though a Tolkien by name, I am a Suffield by tastes, talents and upbringing. […] any corner of that country (however fair of squalid) is in an indefinable way home to me, as no other part of the world is".[41]

[38] Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: a Biography*, London: HarperCollins, 2002, p. 43.
[39] Id., pp. 45-46.
[40] *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien,* edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, Letter 163, p. 227.
[41] Id., Letter 44, p. 63.

The 1904 was not a lucky year for his family. In April a diabetes was diagnosed to Mable and on 14 November she died. In Mable's will father Francis Morgan took the custody of the two boys. Shortly Ronald was sixteen and entered the First Class under the eye of Robert Cary Gilson, a skilled teacher of medieval linguistic. With him the young Tolkien began to study philology and to investigate his love for words and languages. Tolkien made his acquaintance with Anglo-Saxon, also called Old English, the language spoken by the English before the Norman conquest. Ronald obtained the maximum amount of fun when he turned to the greatest Old English poem: *Beowulf*, the story of a warrior who fights a monster and defeats a dragon. Moreover the young Tolkien also discovered the Arthurian medieval tale in Middle English of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and, probably by the same author, he read *Pearl*, an allegorical poem about a dead child. Middle English attracted Ronald even more when he realized that probably it was the dialect spoken by his mother's West Midlands ancestors. Subsequently, he approached Old Norse, and read the story of Sigurðr, which had already fascinated him in his childhood. Nevertheless, the young Tolkien was extremely happy when a friend sold him Joseph Wright's *Primer of Gothic Language*. Humprey Carpenter in Tolkien's biography writes, "Tolkien opened it and immediately experienced a sensation at least full of delight as first looking into Chapman's *Homer".*[42] However, Ronald was not satisfied just to learn Gothic, he wanted to create the words to fill the gaps of the limited vocabulary of that ancient language. He also started inventing his own languages: the 'Animalic', constructed by animal names, then the 'Nevbosh' (or the New Nonsense), and the 'Naffarin', influenced by Spanish, plus a backward language with hypothetical earlier words. Learning languages was not a duty but a pleasure for Ronald. He was eighteen

[42] Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: a Biography*, London: HarperCollins, 2002, p. 58.

when school became the centre of his life with the establishment of the Tea (it changed after its name in Barrovian Society, and then in T.C.B.S). It was an unofficial group that included Christopher Wiseman, R.Q. Gilson, and Geoffrey Bache Smith, all boys with a deep knowledge of Latin and Greek literature. During those years Tolkien wrote his first poem inspired by J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (he saw the play at a Birmingham theatre), and, in W.H. Kirby's Everyman Translation, he also read *Kalevala*, a collection of Finnish mythology. Through it, he discovered Finnish, which then would have influenced the language destined to become famous in Tolkien's novels as *Quenya*, the High-elven. Perhaps, after he read *Kalevala*, Tolkien had already in mind the creation of his own mythology, equal to the Finnish one, but which belonged to England. However, that would not happen for many years yet.

Summer 1911 was for Tolkien the last year at King Edward's. The new chapter of his life started at Oxford, at Exeter College, which would have become his new home, the first real home he knew since his mother's death. He joined the Essay Club, the Dialectical Society, and soon he started his own club: The Apolausticks, 'those devoted to self-indulgence'. Joe Wright was professor of Comparative Philology; he encouraged Tolkien to study Welsh, and it proved to be a good advice; he found Welsh beautiful. Many years after, in 1955, he wrote an essay entitled *English and Welsh*, in which he claimed "Most English-speaking people, for instance, will admit that cellar doors are 'beautiful', especially if dissociated from its sense (and its spelling). More beautiful than, say, sky, and far more beautiful than beautiful. Well then, in Welsh for me cellar doors are extraordinary frequent".[43] In 1913, due to his passion for Old and Middle English, Tolkien

[43] J.R.R. Tolkien, *English and Welsh*, in *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*, edited by Christopher Tolkien, London: George Allen & Urwin, 1983, pp. 190-191.

accepted the suggestion to abandon Classics and to enroll in English Language and Literature. Nevertheless, in that period the English course was torn between two factions: on one side there were medievalists and philologists who wanted to remove from the syllabus every author later than Chaucer, on the other side the supporters of the literature from Chaucer to the nineteenth century. Of course Tolkien took the philologists' side. He studied Old Norse, the language brought to Iceland by the Norwegians in the 9th century, and he read both the Younger or *Prose Edda*, and the Elder or *Poetic Edda*, coming upon the ancient Germanic legends and myths. Among these poems the *Vǫluspá*, the prophecy of the Vǫlva about the creation and doom of the cosmos, had a great influence on Tolkien's imagination. He also read Morris' translation of the *Völsungasaga*, and even other books of the same author, such as *The Life and Death of Jason* and *The House of the Wolfings.* Morris had been a student at Exeter College himself, and his view of literature coincided with Tolkien's: the elder author created a new world with the use of a highly idiosyncratic, archaic, and poetic style. His aim was to recreate the magic and ancient aura of the old and mythological sagas Tolkien loved so much. Like Tolkien, Morris was very meticulous in describing landscapes. Inspired by him, the young English writer decided to adapt in Morris' style the story of Kullervo, the protagonist of *Kalevala*. It was his first essay in verse and prose, unluckily unfinished.

In 1914, Tolkien decided to dedicate himself to poetry and wrote a poem about a mariner who sailed off the earth into the sky, (probably inspired by Cynewulf's *Crist*).[44] He called it *The Voyage of Earendel the Evening Star*, and it was the beginning of his own mythology.

[44] Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: a Biography*, London: HarperCollins, 2002, p. 101.

> Éarendel sprang up from the Ocean's cup
> In the gloom of the mid-world's rim;
> From the door of Night as a ray of light
> Leapt over the twilight brim,
> And launching his bark like a silver spark
> From the golden-fading sand;
> Down the sunlit breath of Day's fiery Death
> He sped from Westerland.[45]

His friend G.B. Smith read it and asked what it was about; Tolkien's answer was "I don't know. I'll try to find out".[46] His words reveals that he saw himself as a discoverer, not an inventor; he found out legends, did not invent them. *Goblin Feet* was Tolkien's first published poem, written for Edith, the woman he was in love with; later he also wrote something in Quenya. However, he realized that to write on occasional topics was not what he wanted. He needed a history to support his poems and languages, because there is no language without people to speak it. Quenya should have belonged to the elves and fairies that Éarendel saw during his journey through the sky. Like any other language, Quenya derived from a more ancient one, the Primitive Eldarin, from which Tolkien created a second elvish language: the Sindarin. He modelled its grammar on Welsh and associated it to other groups of elves. Tolkien also decided to end his hero's journey in the mysterious land of Valinor (these primal ideas will feed *The Silmarillion*).

In 1914 another significant event happened: England declared war to Germany. Tolkien had to give his contribution, so he decided to specialize in signalling. He learnt Morse, how to use heliograph and lamp, and even how to send a carrier pigeon. Fearing death, he married Edith before he left: he was twenty-four when they married. Tolkien never forgot the horror of trench welfare. He survived, but his friends Rob Gilson and G.B.

[45] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Tale of Eärendel,* in *The Book of Lost Tales Part Two,* edited by Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1992, ch. 5, p. 252.
[46] Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: a Biography*, London: HarperCollins, 2002, p. 107.

Smith died in battle. When the war was over, followed by Edith and their first child John Francis Reuel, Tolkien went back to Oxford to find a job. He worked on the New English Dictionary and he quite enjoyed the experience: "I learned more in those two years than in any other equal period of my life"[47]. He filled up his free time by teaching at the University and, when he began to earn enough from tuition, he stopped working on the Dictionary. He applied for the post of Reader in English Language at the University of Leeds, and in 1920 he moved to northern England with Edith, John and the newborn Michael Hilary Reuel. During this period, he continued writing poems and some of them were also printed in the university magazine *The Gryphon.* In 1924, Edith was pregnant again; the child was baptized Christopher Reuel Tolkien. At Leeds, together with the young lecturer E.V. Gordon, Tolkien was responsible for the glossary and the text of a new edition of Middle English poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which was published in 1925. It was his major contribution to medieval literature. In the same year, the Professorship of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford was vacant. Tolkien applied for it and obtained the teaching post. Probably missing the T.C.B.S., Tolkien founded on its model a group of professors to read and to analyze Icelandic sagas (including the *Elder Edda*). They called themselves *the Coalbiters*, in Icelandic *Kolbitar*, those so close to the fire in winter that they 'bite the coal'.[48] To this group belonged C.S. Lewis, who became Tolkien's great friend, and his valiant foe as writer. When in the early 1930s T*he Coalbiters* ceased to meet, Lewis and Tolkien joint *The Inklings*, a literary society founded in 1931. Tolkien dedicated his working time at Oxford to teach and he wrote a paper on the dialects of Chaucer's *Reeve's Tale*, and an article on the Middle English of

[47] Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: a Biography*, London: HarperCollins, 2002, p. 141.
[48] Id., p. 164.

the *Ancrene Wisse.* He also translated *Pearl*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and *Sir Orfeo*. These translations were his last published philological works.

Besides his academic work, Tolkien's life was ordinary and nothing relevant apparently happened, except that he wrote *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*, which are now world bestseller. He held the Professorship at Oxford for twenty years and died peacefully in 1973, at the age of eighty-one. He was buried in the Wolvercote Cemetery at Oxford, next to his wife, and on their gravestone you can read: Edith Mary Tolkien, Lúthien, 1889-1971. John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, Beren, 1892-1973.[49]

2.1 – THE EXTRAORDINARY MIND OF AN ORDINARY MAN

Leaf by Niggle, one of Tolkien's short stories, can tell us much about its author, above all about how he worked. The story starts with these simple words: "There was once a little man called Niggle, who had a long journey to make".[50] Tolkien was literally obsessed with names, he knew everything about them and he never chose one without considering what it meant. Indeed, we can start analyzing *Leaf by Niggle* from the name of the protagonist, Niggle. 'To niggle' was used in the early 17th century in the sense "to spend work of time unnecessarily on pretty details; to be overelaborate in minor points".[51] It is easy to connect Tolkien with the little protagonist. Tolkien was a perfectionist who spent a lot of time on details; Niggle is a painter, "the sort of painter who can paint leaves better than trees"[52] (to understand the allegory, the leaf indicates *The Hobbit* and the tree *The Lord of the Rings*). The philosopher William James would have said that Tolkien had

[49] Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: a Biography*, London: HarperCollins, 2002, p. 342.
[50] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Leaf by Niggle*, in *Tree and Leaf,* London: HarperCollins, 2001, p. 3.
[51] "niggle, v.2." OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/126948. Accessed 17 May 2018.
[52] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Leaf by Niggle*, in *Tree and Leaf,* London: HarperCollins, 2001, p. 3.

'tough-mindedness' and not 'tender-mindedness':[53] he worked in a pragmatic Anglo-Saxon way, on single words and fragments; he was interested in differences more than similarities, and in concrete particulars more than in abstract schemes. However, how did his imagination worked exactly? The answer comes from one of his interviews, cited by Humphrey Carpenter:

> One writes such a story not out of the leaves or trees still to be observed, nor by means of botany and soil-science; but it grows like a seed in the dark out of the leaf-mould of the mind: out of all that has been seen or thought or read, that has long ago been forgotten, descending into the deeps. […] and my mould is evidently made largely of linguistic matter.[54]

Tolkien was certain that dreams and ideas came not from his mind, but from the memory of something that once might have existed, through hidden resonances of languages and names. It is curious to notice how philologists in some way do not draw a clear boundary between imagination and reality; their science makes them accept what they call '*-', 'asterisk-reality'[55], something that no longer exists but could have been real. For a philologist is easy to assume that ideas are real just like linguistic correspondences.

An additional question to ask ourselves about the author is why he liked languages so much. Of course, since he was a child he had an unusual sensitivity to the shapes and sounds of the words. Words inspired in him emotions in the same way music does in many people. If Tolkien had been interested in music, he would have composed melodies; but he loved languages, so he created languages, melodies with groups of words. In particular he decided to specialize in early English, above all Anglo-Saxon and Middle English, when he found they were both languages spoken by the Suffields, his mother's

[53] "tough-ˈminded, adj." OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/203912. Accessed 17 May 2018.
[54] Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: a Biography*, London: HarperCollins, 2002, p. 171.
[55] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 22.

ancestors. He was emotionally attached to the West Midlands due to his mother's death, so much as to write in a letter to W. H. Auden, "I am a West-Midlander by blood, and took to early West-Midland Middle English as to a known tongue as soon as I set eyes on it".[56] In some way he really thought he had inherited from his ancestors some memories of a language spoken seven hundred and fifty years before. His love for words brought Tolkien to become a pure English philologist, and not one "trained in Germany".[57] Philology was indeed born in Germany in the 19th century, and had never a central role in English Universities.

After the First World War, as mentioned above, Tolkien was involved in the old rift of the English School between Language and Literature: the Language side wanted the student to spend a lot of time on philology, on the other hand the Literature side wanted to concentrate upon Milton and Shakespeare. Tolkien was certain that to divide the two factions would be an error: he had always matched the love for languages with a good knowledge of their literatures. An allegory of the feud between literary critics and philologists is contained in another one of Tolkien's short stories, *Smith of Wootton Major*. Once again, we can start analyzing his work from Nokes, the name of the Master Cook in the story. The name Nokes derives from a town in Oxfordshire, which in Old English was called *æt þam àcum*, 'at the oaks', and then became in Middle English **atten okes*, and by mistake in Modern English it arrived as 'at Nokes'.[58] It is then subject to *nunnation*, the English habit to add an 'n' in front of a word, which originally does not

[56] *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien,* edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, Letter 163, p. 127.
[57] Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: a Biography*, London: HarperCollins, 2002, p. 181.
[58] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 310.

have one.[59] The word 'oak' had a special meaning for Tolkien: when at Leeds he was in the middle of the feud between students of literature and philologists, he created a private scheme in which an oak symbolized the first side, a birch the second (as anticipated in the previous section). Nokes figures then as a literary critic: he does not understand the charm of fantasy and associates the supernatural with stories for children. In *Smith of Wootton Major*, Nokes makes a Great Cake, which is good (Tolkien had nothing against literary scholars), but not enough for everyone, no bigger than was needed;[60] there was not enough food for the imagination. Furthermore, he had stolen some ideas from an old book of recipes[61], an allegory that indicates how literary critics use philology to enrich their works, even if they refuse to recognise it. Moreover, as philology never left Tolkien and helped him to write his novels, so in *Smith of Wootton Major* a birch, for Tolkien the symbol of philology, saves the protagonist from the Wind who tries to tear him away.[62]

Other elements make *Smith of Wootton Major* an unusual work. It was composed on the typewriter, although Tolkien usually preferred to write by hand, and like *Leaf by Niggle*, it may have been unconsciously related to the author. In the story, Smith, eating a slice of the Great Cake, swallows a magic star that let him reach the realm of Faery;[63] however, at the end of the story, Smith will have to give back his star to Alf, which turns out to be the king of Faery[64], (in Anglo-Saxon *ælf* was the word for elf).[65] Tolkien knew that he was close to retirement and he should have surrendered his own star, his imagination,

[59] "nunation, n." OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/129208. Accessed 17 May 2018.
[60] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Smith of Wootton Major*, London: Harper Collins, 1995, p. 4.
[61] Id., p. 3.
[62] Id., p. 7.
[63] Id., p. 6.
[64] Id., p. 11.
[65] "elf, n.1." OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/60431. Accessed 17 May 2018.

which let him wander for long. It was indeed the last story he wrote. The contrast between oaks and birches is also present in Tolkien's Anglo-Saxon poetry *Èadig bèo þu*, whose last lines in translation read as follow, "The oak shall fall into the fire, losing joy and life and leaf. The birch shall keep its glory long, shine splendidly over the bright plain".[66] Even more clarifying about the role of the good philologist is one of Tolkien's lectures, contained in *Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*. He denounced the way earlier critics treated *Beowulf* in another allegory, known as 'the allegory of the tower':

> A man inherited a field in which was an accumulation of old stone, part of an older hall. Of the old stone some had already been used in building the house in which he actually lived, not far from the old house of his fathers. Of the rest he took some and built a tower. But his friends coming perceived at once (without troubling to climb the steps) that these stones had formerly belonged to a more ancient building. So they pushed the tower over, with no little labour, and in order to look for hidden carvings and inscriptions, or to discover whence the man's distant forefathers had obtained their building material. Some suspecting a deposit of coal under the soil began to dig for it, and forgot even the stones. They all said: 'This tower is most interesting.' But they also said (after pushing it over): 'What a muddle it is in!' And even the man's own descendants, who might have been expected to consider what he had been about, were heard to murmur: 'He is such an odd fellow! Imagine using these old stones just to build a nonsensical tower! Why did not he restore the old house? He had no sense of proportion.' But from the top of that tower the man had been able to look out upon the sea.[67]

As in every allegory, each element of the story is the object of an equivalence: the man is the *Beowulf*'s poet, the tower is his poem, and the friends looking for hidden carvings are Beowulf's critics. Tolkien's aim was to argue that scholars, in search of other kinds of knowledge, missed the pure poetry and the aesthetic element of the poem. Critics should treat *Beowulf* as a poem and not as a mere archive of history and language. According to Carpenter's words, Tolkien believed that "the prime function of a linguist is to interpret

[66] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Èadig bèo þu*, quoted by Tom Shippey in *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 403.
[67] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, edited by Christopher Tolkien, London: George Allen & Urwin, 1983, pp. 7-8.

literature, and the prime function of literature is to be enjoyed".[68] Furthermore, Tolkien believed that both the linguistic and the literary approach were not enough to analyze a work of art, above all the more ancient ones. What was needed was a third dimension: a philological approach.

In the same way many tried to find a proper definition to the term *fantasy* (as we have seen in the first chapter), also the term *philology* is hard to define. The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers three options: (a) love of learning and literature; the branch of knowledge that deals with the historical, linguistic, interpretative, and critical aspects of literature; literary or classical scholarship; (b) love of talk or argument; (c) the historical study of the phonology and morphology of languages; historical linguistics.[69] All these definitions, like those of the term fantasy, are vague, and confuse philology with (a) literature, (b) philosophy or (c) linguistic. The redefinition of philology came in 1786 when Sir William Jones highlighted that Sanskrit was similar to Greek and Latin, and it was not by chance: he hypothesized all these languages, together with Celtic and Germanic and many other languages, derived from a no longer existing common source, the Proto-Indo-European.[70] After Jones' deduction, scholars tried to look not for chance resemblances, but for regular changes, making philology comparative and historical. For example, the Modern English 'daughter' has something in common with the Sanskrit term *duhitar*, which means 'the little milker';[71] the job was often given to daughters, so that familial relationship and work merged. These analogies were enlightening not only for

[68] Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: a Biography*, London: HarperCollins, 2002, p. 191.
[69] "philology, n." OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/142464. Accessed 17 May 2018.
[70] Jones, Sir William, D*iscourses delivered before the Asiatic Society: and miscellaneous papers, on the religion, poetry, literature, etc., of the nations of India*, London: Printed by C. S. Arnold, 1824, p. 28.
[71] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 13.

the meaning of words, but also to discover the traditions of the peoples who used them. Every word told a story.

Jacob Grimm, a philologist himself, gave a better interpretation of *philology* in the *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, which defines *philologie* as "gelehrtes studium der (namentlich classischen) sprachen und literaturen" [the learned study of the (especially Classical) languages and literatures].[72] However, more interesting than the definition itself is a quotation from Jacob Grimm, "Keine unter allen wissenschaften ist hochmütiger, vornehmer, streitsüchtiger als die philologie und gegen fehler unbarmherziger" [none among all the sciences is prouder, nobler, more disputatious than philology, or less merciful to error].[73] Philology was then the noblest among the sciences, which concerned the classics and the German language in a mix of literature and linguistic. Comparative philology, inspired by Sir William Jones and used as a guide by Tolkien, is then the only useful instrument to investigate Middle-earth.

The main role that philology had in Tolkien's novels is clearly revealed by a letter he wrote to the Houghton Mifflin, his American publishers:

> The remark about 'philology' was intended to allude to what is I think a primary 'fact' about my work, that it is all of a piece, and fundamentally linguistic in inspiration. […] The invention of languages is the foundation. The 'stones' were made rather to provide a world for the languages than the reverse. To me a name comes first and the story follows. I should have preferred to write in 'Elvish'. […] But there is a great deal of linguistic matter (other than actually 'elvish' names and words) included or mythologically expressed in the book. It is to me, anyway, largely an essay in 'linguistic aesthetic', as I sometimes say to people who ask me 'what is it all about?' It is not 'about' anything but itself.[74]

[72] "philologie, n.", *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*, Trier Center for Digital Humanities, March 2018, http://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemma=philologie, Accessed 17 May 2018.
[73] Ibidem.
[74] *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien,* edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, Letter 165, p. 232.

Moreover, in 1924 Holger Pedersen defined philology as "a study whose task is the interpretation of the literary monuments in which the spiritual life of a given period has found expression"[75]; after him Leonard Bloomfield gave his interpretation defining philology as "the study of national culture […] something much greater than a misfit combination of language plus literature".[76] These definitions added to philology its spiritual and national side, bringing light to ancient legends and myths. In a conversation with his friend Lewis Tolkien claimed, "You call a star a star, and say it is just a ball of matter moving on a mathematical course. But that is merely how you see it. By so naming things and describing them you are only inventing your own terms about them. And just as speech is invention about objects and ideas, so myth is invention about truth".[77] Of course, myths come from people and not directly from God, so they can contain errors, they can be imperfect. As Tolkien wrote in his essay *On Fairy-stories*, only becoming a sub-creator, a creator himself, man can aspire to perfection.[78] Nevertheless, as we have already seen, Tolkien believed he was not inventing stories, but he was finding out ancient legends and myths. To support this view in his letter 180 he claimed, "I have long ceased to invent (though even patronizing or sneering critics on the side praise my 'invention'): I wait till I seem to know what really happened. Or till it writes itself"[79], and still in letter 131, "I believe that legends and myths are largely made of 'truth', and indeed present aspects of it that can only be received in this mode; and long ago certain truths and modes

[75] H. Pedersen, *The Discovery of Language: Linguistic Science in the Ninetheenth Century*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962, p. 79.
[76] L. Bloomfield, *Why a Linguistic Society?,* Language vol. 1 (1925), Washington: Linguistic Society of America, p. 1, http://www.jstor.org/stable/409544, Accessed 30 March 2018.
[77] Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: a Biography*, London: HarperCollins, 2002, p. 220.
[78] J.R.R. Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, London: HarperCollins, 2014, p. 42.
[79] *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien,* edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, Letter 180, p. 232.

of this kind were discovered and must always reappear".[80] Even Aristotle in his *Poetics*, analyzing the difference between history and poetry, affirmed, "The real difference is this that one tells what happened and the other what might happen. For this reason poetry is something more scientific and serious than history, because poetry tends to give general truths while history gives particular facts".[81]

[80] *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, Letter 131, p. 167.
[81] Aristotle, *Poetics*, part IX, quoted by John William Cunliffe, Ashley Horace Thorndike, et al., in *The Library of the World's Best Literature, An Anthology in Thirty Volumes,* New York: Warner Library, 1917.

3 – A PHILOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF TOLKIEN'S NOVELS

Depth is the literary quality Tolkien valued most.[82] However, nowadays readers of fantasy focus mostly on plot, looking for great events, heroic characters and dangerous situations. Nevertheless, examples of that depth, to which Tolkien dedicated himself so much, can be found in very ancient verses. In his essay about *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, published in 1983, Tolkien declared that the poem had deep roots in the past, going back to tales told elsewhere in remote times, beyond the awareness of the poet himself.[83] Tolkien explained his concept of depth in *Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*:

> What is this flavour, this atmosphere, this virtue that such rooted works have, and which compensates for the inevitable flaws and imperfect adjustments that must appear, when plots, motives, symbols, are rehandled and pressed into the service of the changed minds of later time, used for the expression of ideas quite different from those which produced them.[84]

The roots of a text are not just matter for academic studies; they affect the nature of the text itself and, if readers tries to hear what words in the text say, they can listen to many more stories than just the main one. The following paragraphs want to help regular or new readers of Tolkien's novels to concentrate their attention on details, names and hidden information, to find other stories behind the principal one, some very ancient and almost forgotten, analyzing in particular three of the main works of the author: *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* and, lastly, *The Silmarillion.*

[82] Tom Shippey, T*he Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p.351.
[83] Id., p .356.
[84] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays,* edited by Christopher Tolkien, London: George Allen & Urwin, 1983, p. 72.

3.1 - *THE HOBBIT*: SONGS ABOUT BERSERKS AND OTHER LEGENDS

"In a hole in the ground there lived a Hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a Hobbit-hole, and that means comfort".[85]

With these famous words, Tolkien began *The Hobbit*. But what is a hobbit? The term appeared in J. Hardy's edition of *The Denham Tracts* (Vol. II), which, making a list of insubstantial and imaginary creatures, affirmed "The whole earth was overrun with ghosts, boggles… hobbits, hobgoblins";[86] nevertheless, Hardy's fantastical beings were associated with spiritual creatures and had nothing to do with Tolkien's hobbits. Though the term was certainly not an ancient word, neither was it invention. Tolkien preferred to talk about 'inspiration'. Humphrey Carpenter writes that during a summer's day Tolkien was marking exam papers, and one of the candidates had left the page blank; the best case for a professor. Tolkien wrote on it "In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit".[87] He did not even know what a hobbit was, that is why, according to his usual attitude, he felt he had to find out. Tolkien did not rest until he found an acceptable etymology. On the last appendix of *The Lord of the Rings* he wrote that the word 'hobbit' derived from the Anglo-Saxon **hol-bytla*, 'hole-builder' or 'hole-dweller'.[88] It resolved Tolkien's inspiration: in a hole in the ground lived a hole-liver. This indicated that the term 'hobbit' was in line with the rigid rules of the linguistic history, and that something similar to these creatures might as well have existed in reality.

[85] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, London: HarperCollins, 2001, ch. 1, p. 10.
[86] *The Denham Tracts,* vol.II, London: Forgotten Books, 2017.
[87] Humphrey Carpenter, J.R.R. *Tolkien: a Biography*, London: HarperCollins, 2002, p. 230.
[88] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, Boston: Mariner Books, 2005, Appendix F, p. 1166.

Tolkien rejected the critics' assumption that 'hobbit' derived from the word 'rabbit':[89] "Calling Bilbo a 'nasty little rabbit' was a piece of vulgar trollery, just as 'descendant of rats' was a piece of dwarfish malice".[90] However, in *The Hobbit* many assertions run against Tolkien's affirmation, starting in chapter 2 with Bilbo's encounter with the trolls who believe he is a rabbit[91], or in his comparison with the animal, when he sees the eagle in chapter 6 and thinks "of being torn up for supper".[92] Some pages later the eagle says to him "You need not be frightened like a rabbit, even if you look rather like one"[93], just like Beorn in an insensitive and rude way, as his character requests, pokes at Bilbo's waistcoat affirming "Little bunny is getting nice and fat again on bread and honey"[94], up to chapter 16, in which Thorin shakes Bilbo like a rabbit.[95] To explain better Tolkien's aversion for the term 'rabbit' it is necessary to go back in 1915, when he wrote *Goblin Feet* and created the neologisms '*coney-rabbit'*.[96] It happened because 'rabbit' is a peculiar term: it differs in several European languages, for example the German 'Kaninchen', or the French 'lapin', but there is no Old English or Old Norse word for it. This is unusual. If it is easy to trace a parallel among the North European's names of animals, as for 'hare', which in Old English is 'hara', in Old Norse 'heri', and in German 'hase', 'rabbit' appears in English not before 1398.[97] The only reason is to suppose that rabbits were immigrants, which arrived in England only in the thirteenth century. Words

[89] Tom Shippery, *The Road to Middle Earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 77.
[90] Ibidem.
[91] J.R.R. Tolkien*, The Hobbit*, London: HarperCollins, 2001, ch. 2, p. 28.
[92] Id., ch. 6, p. 68.
[93] Id., ch. 7, p. 71.
[94] Id., ch. 7, p. 81.
[95] Id., ch. 16, p. 158.
[96] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Goblin Feet*, quoted by Tom Shippey, in *The Road to Middle Earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 34.
[97] "rabbit, n.1." OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/156978. Accessed 17 May 2018.

have always stories to tell. The first time Bilbo Baggins appears in the book, he is at his door, smoking an enormous long wooden pipe. He always smokes "pipe-weed, or leaf"[98], as declared in *The Lord of the Rings*' prologue, and not tobacco. Tolkien did not like the word 'rabbit' because it was not English, it was foreign, and for the same reason he preferred 'pipeweed' to 'tobacco'. Nevertheless, in the first edition of *The Hobbit*, Bilbo uses the word 'tobacco'[99], just like Gandalf does with 'tomatoes'[100], and in *The Lord of the Rings* Sam discusses with Gollum about 'taters'[101] (a more native-sounding word for potatoes, coming from colloquial English).[102] Furthermore, Sam says to Gollum he could cook some potatoes once, and then he adds "I will: fried fish and chips served by S. Gamgee".[103] There is nothing more English and less Old English than a portion of fish and chips. In the final analysis, the only association between hobbits and rabbits follows this lead: just like rabbits insinuated themselves into the list of English animals' names, hobbits were inserted into the verbally authenticated world of elves, orcs, dwarfs and ettens. Rabbits were not in ancient legends but they existed, maybe just nobody noticed them. Tolkien thought the same happened with hobbits, "unobtrusive but very ancient people"[104]. Once again, he used the history of words to construct his own tale: from 'hol-bytla' and the analogy with the term 'rabbit' Tolkien created hobbits. As maybe Tolkien would like, because for him names told as many stories as narrations, before continuing to talk about these strange and odd creatures, we will analyze the origin of the names of

[98] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Ring*, London: HarperCollins, 1954, Prologue, p. 10.
[99] J.R.R. Tolkien*, The Hobbit*, London: HarperCollins, 2001, ch. 1, p. 11.
[100] Id., ch. 1, p. 14.
[101] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Two Towers,* London: HarperCollins, 1982, ch.4, p. 261.
[102] "tater, n." OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/198088. Accessed 17 May 2018.
[103] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Two Towers,* London: HarperCollins, 1982, ch.4, p. 261.
[104] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Ring*, London: HarperCollins, 1954, Prologue, p. 30.

the other protagonists of the story: Gandalf and the dwarfs, starting from the noun 'dwarf'. It is an old word, found in Old Norse as *dvergr*, in Old English as *dweorh*, in Old High German as *twerg*, in Gothic as **dvairgs*.[105] About the plural form, Tolkien preferred 'dwarves' to the current 'dwarfs'. That is why the ending in *-ves* reclaims the original formation of plural nouns, as maintained for 'life/lives', 'hoof/hooves', and not so many other names that succeeded to escape the more easy solution of the plural in *-s*.[106] About dwarfs' behaviour and features, many sources show that men dealt with them in the past. In the first place, in the Grimms' fairy-tale *Snow White,* dwarfs are associated with mining and gold.[107] The second main feature of these creatures is their affiliation with violated contracts. In Snorri Sturluson's *Edda,* an Old Norse work of literature written in Iceland in the early 13th century, many were the Norse god Loki's mischiefs against the dwarfs (in the *Skáldskaparmál* Loki stripped the dwarf Andvari of everything he had, and refuses to pay another dwarf with the head he lost in a bet).[108] Snorri's *Edda* was a fundamental text for Tolkien's idea and portrayal of dwarfs, especially when it comes to their pride. In his poem *Hjaðningavíg*, 'the Everlasting Battle', the pirate king Heðinn kidnaps the daughter of the king Hǫgni. This last, looking for revenge, wants to kill Heðinn, so he refuses his offer of reconciliation saying: "Too late do you offer to make peace with me, for now I have drawn the sword Dainsleif, which was smithied by the dwarfs, and must be the death of a man whenever it is drawn";[109] the battle goes on until the Doomsday.

[105] "dwarf, n. and adj." OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/58751. Accessed 17 May 2018.
[106] Tom Shippery, *The Road to Middle Earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 64.
[107] Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm, *Snow white and the seven dwarfs*, Household Tales, translated by Margaret Hunt, London: George Bell, 1884, p. 3.
[108] Snorri Sturluson, *Prose Edda, Skáldskaparmál*, Blackmask Online, 2001, http://www.blackmask.com, Accessed 17 March 2018*,* p. 68,
[109] Snorri Sturluson, *Prose Edda*, *Hjaðningavíg,* Blackmask Online, 2001, http://www.blackmask.com, Accessed 17 March 2018, p. 80.

Relevant is Hǫgni's decision to fight for pride rather than accept a compromise, and his sword without mercy Dáinsleif, the objective correlative[110] of his emotions. Moreover, the dwarfs' collocation under the mountain is a clear reference to the *Vǫluspá*, the great Old Norse poem about the end of the world, first poem of the *Poetic Edda,* an collection of Old Norse anonymous poems. In it dwarfs are connected with stone: "stynia dvergar fyr steindurom [The dwarfs grieve before their door of stone]".[111] Common elements among so many works, so far in time and space, is what Tolkien was looking for, depth, a proof of some original unity, what the Grimms called *des ursprünglichen Zusammenhangs,*[112] (primordial connection).

About Gandalf, Humphrey Carpenter wrote that Tolkien owned a postcard entitled *Der Berggeist* (the mountain spirit), and on its cover was written "the origin of Gandalf".[113] The postcard reproduced a painting of a bearded figure, sitting on a rock under a pine tree in a mountainous setting. He wore a wide-brimmed round hat and a long red cloak, while a white fawn was nuzzling his upturned hands. Carpenter claimed Tolkien probably bought the postcard in 1911, during his holiday in Switzerland.[114] Many of Tolkien's critics spelled Gandalf's name in the wrong way, from which comes Edmund Wilson's Gandalph, or even Edwin Muir's Gandolf.[115] This can seem completely trivial to many readers, but not to a philologist like Tolkien, who thought that words authenticated thing. He knew that 'ph' for 'f' was a learned spelling introduced from about the 14th century to

[110] T.S. Eliot, *Hamlet and His Problems*, in *The Sacred Wood*: *Essays on Poetry and Criticism,* New York: Bartleby.com, 2000, p. 4.
[111] *Vǫluspá*, stanza 48, edited by Marcello Meli, in *Vǫluspá. Un'apocalisse norrena,* Roma: Carocci, 2008, p. 180, translated in English by W.H. Auden and P.B. Taylor, Blackmask Online, 2001, https://asatruhun.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/voluspa-angolul.pdf, Accessed 21 March 2018, p. 6.
[112] Preface to J. and W. Grimm, *Haus- und Kindermärchen*, Beltz: Der KinderbuchVerlag, 2016, p. 28.
[113] Humphrey Carpenter, *Tolkien: a Biography*, London: HarperCollins, 2002, p. 76.
[114] Ibidem.
[115] Tom Shippery, *The Road to Middle Earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 5.

English from Latin, mostly for Greek words like 'philosophy' or 'physics', and it was not applied to native words like 'fire' of 'foot'. It is clear that Gandalf was not a Greek word and the form Gandalph sounded to Tolkien as strange as 'phire', 'phat' or 'elph'. As regards Gandolf, it was a Latinism, an Italian miscomprehension from Robert Browning's *The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's church* in which is quoted "Old Gandolf envied me" referring to and Italian character named Gandolfo.[116] While writing *The Hobbit*, Tolkien gave initially the name Gandalf to the leader of the dwarfs, the one that later was called Thorin Oakenshield. The wizard that then became Gandalf was originally named Bladorthin, a name later assigned to an ancient king who had ordered some spears from the dwarfs.[117] Nevertheless, both names, as all the other dwarfs' names (except Balin, quoted by Malory in *Le Morte d'Arthur*)[118], come from the same source: *The Dvergatal*, the catalogue of dwarfs in the *Vǫluspá*.

Þar var Móðsognir mæztr um orðinn	There was Motsognir the mightiest made
dverga allra, en Durinn annarr;	Of all the dwarfs, and Durin next;
þeir mannlíkun mörg um görðu	Many a likeness of men they made,
dvergar í jörðu, sem Durinn sagði. Nýi,	The dwarfs in the earth, as Durin said.
Niði, Norðri, Suðri,	Nyi and Nithi, Northri and Suthri,
Austri, Vestri, Alþjófr, Dvalinn,	Austri and Vestri, Althjof, Dvalin,
Nár ok Náinn, Nípingr, Dáinn,	Nar and Nain, Niping, Dain,
Bifurr, Bafurr, Bömburr, Nori,	Bifur, Bofur, Bombur, Nori,
Ánn ok Ánarr, Óinn, Mjöðvitnir.	An and Onar, Ai, Mjothvitnir..
Veggr ok Gandálfr, Vindálfr, Þorinn,	Vigg and Gandalf) Vindalf, Thrain,
Þrár ok Þráinn, Þekkr, Litr ok Vitr,	Thekk and Thorin, Thror, Vit and Lit,
Nýr ok Nýráðr, nú hefi ek dverga,	Nyr and Nyrath, now have I told--
Reginn ok Ráðsviðr, rétt um talða.	Regin and Rathsvith the list aright.[119]

[116] R. Browning, *the Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's church*, Providence: Brown University, 2010, p. 10, line 5.
[117] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Annotated Hobbit*, edited by D. Anderson, London: HarperCollins, 2003, Inside Information, note 9, p. 287.
[118] Jim Allan, *An Introduction to Elvish*, Bran's Head Books Ltd, 1978, p. 223.
[119] *Vǫluspá,* stanza 9-10, edited by Marcello Meli, in *Vǫluspá. Un'apocalisse norrena,* Roma: Carocci, 2008, pp.79-82, translated in English by W.H. Auden and P.B. Taylor, Blackmask Online, 2001, https://asatruhun.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/voluspa-angolul.pdf, Accessed 21 March 2018, p. 6.

The long list of names of Durinn's lineage continues for the next 7 stanzas, including also the name of Thorin's relative Dain, of his father Thráin, his grandfather Thror, their ancestor Durin, and even Thorin's nickname, *Eikinskjaldi*, Oakenshield.[120] The Old Norse Gandalfr is instead a compound name formed from the words *gandr* meaning 'staff', 'wand', or 'magic' especially in compounds, and the word *álfr,* 'elf' (even if he is neither an elf, nor a human). The name Gandalf can also be found in another Norse myth: Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*, a collection of sagas about the Norwegian kings in which he describes Gandalf Alfgeirsson, a legendary Norse king from Eastern Norway.[121] In addition, William Morris, who deeply influenced Tolkien, used the name in his fantasy novel *The Well at the World's End.*[122] Throughout the early drafts of *The Hobbit*, Gandalf is described as "an old man with a staff";[123] his role will substantially increase in *The Lord of the Ring.* About Gandalf Tolkien wrote in a letter of 1954, "he was an incarnate angel".[124]

What characterizes most *The Hobbit* is the persistent desire of the author to recover the archaic world of the North, which so much fascinated Walter Scott and William Morris before him. Tolkien's aim was to narrate Northern legends, because most of those that survived were incomplete. His ambition had, among others, an evident obstacle: to readapt them for modern readers. A contemporary reader would have treated characters such as Beowulf with irony, as happened in John Gardner's novel *Grendel* (1971), which retold part of the Old English poem *Beowulf* from the perspective of the antagonist,

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[120] *Vǫluspá,* stanza 11-16, edited by Marcello Meli, in *Vǫluspá. Un'apocalisse norrena,* Roma: Carocci, 2008, pp.83-89.
[121] Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla: A History of the Norse Kings*, translated by Samuel Laing, London: Norrœna society, 1906.
[122] William Morris, *The Well at the World's End*, Charleston: Nabu Press, 2010.
[123] J.R.R. Tolkien*, The Hobbit*, London: HarperCollins, 2001, ch. 1, p. 11.
[124] *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien,* edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, Letter 156, p. 216.

Grendel.[125] The only way to cross this obstacle was to create a mediator. Here Bilbo Baggins enters the scene, representing the voice and the point of view of modern society. Bilbo is not a hero, he is not seeking for revenge and knows nothing about the world outside the Shire, he does not know how to hunt because he is used to having his meat delivered, and, certainly, he cannot "hoot twice like a barn-owl and once like a screech-owl"[126]. His surname Baggins is a clear reference to modern English culture: in northern counties of England every meal eaten between lunch and dinner, especially tea, was called in dialectic 'baggins', even if the Oxford English dictionary prefers the form 'bagging'.[127] At the beginning of *The Hobbit* Bilbo appears as a perfect middleclass man, proud of his mediocrity and ordinary life. He is, however, different from his cousins, the Sackville-Baggins that have broken their connection with the traditions of Bag End, where Bilbo still lives, and have replaced them with the snob French suffix *–ville* in their surname. It is also ironic that, throughout the story, Bilbo starts being a bourgeois, but Gandalf turns him into a burglar. Both 'burglar' and 'bourgeois' come from the same Old English (but probably Old French) root 'burh', 'stockaded house'; the Middle English 'burgulator' is who enters a building, 'bourgeois' is who lives in a building.[128] They are opposed, but related, like the Baggins and the Sackville-Baggins. In spite of Bilbo's modern traits, he has a place in the ancient world. The first part of the story plays much on the divergences between the ancient and the modern world. Mr. Baggins' first encounter with Gandalf is

[125] John Gardner, *Grendel*, New York: Random House, 1971.
[126] J.R.R. Tolkien*, The Hobbit*, London: HarperCollins, 2001, ch. 2, p. 27.
[127] "bagging, n.4." OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/14635. Accessed 17 May 2018.
[128] "burglar, n." OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/24948. Accessed 17 May 2018.

a satire of modern institutions. The wizard points at Bilbo's contradictory language more than once. Emblematic is their first dialogue:

> "Good Morning!" said Bilbo, and he meant it. The sun was shining, and the grass was very green. But Gandalf looked at him from under long bushy eyebrows that stuck out further than the brim of his shady hat. "What do you mean?" he said. "Do you wish me a good morning, or mean that it is a good morning whether I want it or not; or that you feel good this morning; or that it is a morning to be good on?" "All of them at once," said Bilbo. […] "Good morning!" he said at last. "We don't want any adventures here, thank you! You might try over The Hill or across The Water." By this he meant that the conversation was at an end. "What a lot of things you do use Good morning for!" said Gandalf. "Now you mean that you want to get rid of me, and that it won't be good till I move off."[129]

As Gandalf underlines, Bilbo's 'Good Morning' is not just a greeting; it can be either an objective statement, or a wish offered to the other person, or a signal of hostility, or all of them together. Moreover, his "I beg your pardon" is not a real request for something; his "my dear sir" means nothing, and his "not at all" means 'yes'. On the contrary, the dwarfs' ceremonious style of salutation "At your service" may seems excessive but at least it has a meaning, it is not semantically empty. The ancient way of speech seems more real than the modern one.

Another element that defines *The Hobbit* is the author's introduction of unbelievable and incredible situations, if they were natural and ordinary: "It was often said that long ago one of the Took ancestors must have taken a fairy wife"[130], "Trolls' purses are the mischief"[131], or even "That, of course, is the way to talk to dragons".[132] This device creates the sensation that events follow some rules implying a deep history, just outlined, that exists above the story. The more irrelevant details are insert, the more the story results

[129] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, London: HarperCollins, 2001, ch. 1, p. 11.
[130] Id., p. 10.
[131] Id., ch. 2, p. 28.
[132] Id., ch. 12, p. 131.

realistic. Bilbo, like the readers, knows nothing about these apparently obvious rules. That is why in chapter 2 the trolls catch him, because he could not have predicted their pursues could talk. However, right after, he is saved by another rule: "trolls, as you probably know, must be underground before dawn, or they go back to the stuff of the mountains they are made of, and never move again"[133]. Nobody could have known it, indeed, it is not true, but the assurance of Gandalf and the dwarfs turns out to be stronger than the ignorance of Bilbo and of the reader. In this specific case, the belief that trolls turn into stone at daylight goes back to the *Elder Edda*, at the end of the *Alvíssmál*, when Thórr talks with the dwarf Alvíss until dawn, so that he turns to stone.[134] The young reader can laugh at all these improbable assumptions, but the adult starts to think that redundancy is truth.

Another clear difference between the ancient and the modern world, which we have already introduced at the beginning talking about the figure of the hero, concerns the definition of courage. Modern readers find the lack of any fear in *Beowulf*'s or in the *Elder Edda*'s characters who fought the Ragnarök exaggerated and unnatural. In his 1936 essay *Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, what Tolkien calls 'the theory of courage' exemplifies one of the highest qualities of Northern heroes: the persistence to do the right thing even if it means certain defeat without any reward. In the epic Anglo Saxon poem, Wiglaf is at Beowulf's side even while his beloved lord fights against the fury of the dragon.

[133] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, London: HarperCollins, 2001, ch. 2, p. 32.
[134] *Poetic Edda, Alvíssmál*, stanza 16, translated by Henry Adams Bellows, 1936, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe12.htm>

> Then I heard how the earl alongside the king
> in the hour of need made known the valour,
> boldness and strength that were bred in him.[135]

The Battle of Maldon, an Anglo Saxon poem recounting a conflict fought between the Anglo Saxons and Viking invaders in 991 AD, can give another clear example of Northern courage, as Byrhtnoth, leader of the Saxons, speaks out to his companions preparing them to the last attack while his remaining warriors lie dead:

> Hige sceal þe heardra, heorte þe cenre,
> mod sceal þe mare þe ure maegen lytlað.
>
> [Will shall be the sterner, heart the bolder, spirit
> the greater as our strength lessens.] [136]

These lines strongly recall the ancient heroic impetus, the melancholic beauty of spirit of the Northern courage, by which Tolkien was inspired.

Besides Northern courage, in *Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, Tolkien also discussed the principle of pride that characterized the Anglo Saxon heroes. Taking again *The Battle of Maldon* as an example, Byrhtnoth allows the Vikings to cross over into the mainland before the battle and to recreate the army. A decision that will lead his battalion to certain defeat.

> Ða se eorl ongan for his ofermode
> alyfan landes to fela laþere ðeode.
>
> [Then the earl in his overmastering pride actually yielded ground to the enemy, as he
> should not have done.][137]

[135] *Beowulf*, translated by Seamus Heaney, New York: W.W. Norton, 2000, lines 2691-2693, p. 181.
[136] *The Battle of Maldon,* translated in *Tree and Leaf* by J.R.R. Tolkien, in *The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son*, London: HarperCollins, 2001, p. 71.
[137] Ibidem.

In Tolkien's essay *Ofermod*, contained in the alliterative poem *The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son*, inspired by *The Battle of Maldon*, he analyzed deeply the word *ofermode* and its ambiguous meaning.[138] Though it contains the word 'mod' ('boldness'), he rejected to define it simply as 'over-boldness', and preferred to link 'mod' to 'spirit', much more significant to the Northern pride. Courage can never be a negative thing, but pride can; when courage becomes extreme and selfish overconfidence, then *ofermode* leads inevitably to defeat.

One of Tolkien's characters that better represents in *The Hobbit* the Northern definition of courage is Thorin Oakenshield. He is the leader of the dwarfs and king of the Lonely Mountain, also known as Erebor. He travels with his company going through the Misty Mountains and Mirkwood. Both names derive from older works. In Tolkien's letter 289, to his grandson Michael, he claims, "Mirkwood is not an invention of mine, but a very ancient name, weighted with legendary associations".[139] Discussing its etymology Tolkien added that Myrkviðr was probably the primitive Germanic name for the forest that formed a barrier to the Germanic expansion. In Old German *mirkiwidu* came probably from **merkw*-, 'dark', and **widu*-, 'timber'. In Old English it is instead found in Beowulf 1405: *ofer myrcan mor*, in the sense 'dark', or rather 'gloomy'.[140] The Old Norse name Myrkviðr is also cited in the *Elder Edda* as the "dark boundary-forest [...] the great forest that divided the land of the Goths from the land of the Huns".[141] Also William Morris used the term Mirkwood in his *The House of the Wolfings*.[142] The Misty Mountain

[138] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorthelm's Son,* 1966, http://ae-lib.org.ua/texts-c/tolkien__the_homecoming_of_beorhtnoth__en.htm, Accessed 10 April 2018.
[139] *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien,* edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, Letter 289, p. 400.
[140] Ibidem.
[141] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún*, edited by Christopher Tolkien, pp. 227-228.
[142] Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull, *The Lord of the Rings: A Reader's Companion*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2005, Prologue, p. 13.

is instead mentioned in the poem *Skirnismál* of the *Poetic Edda*, where Freyr's page says to his horse:

> Myrct er útil, mál qveð ec ocr fara
> úrig fiöll yfir, þyrja þjóð yfir:
> báðir við komomc, eða ocr báða tecr sá inn ámátki iötunn.
>
> [It is mirk outside, I call it our business to fare over the misty mountains, over the tribes of Thyrses; we will both come back, or he will take us both, he the mighty giant.][143]

The term *úrig* can be translated as 'moist', to which Tolkien preferred 'misty'; the tribes of Thyrses indicated instead ogres.[144] Thorin, during his long journey, follows exactly the *Skirnismál*'s route, going through ogres' tribes, the Misty Mountain, to finally reach the Lonely Mountain and to reclaim his kingdom, stolen by the greedy dragon Smaug.

Dragons are famous for their love for gold. In the film version of T*he Hobbit* it is clear from the beginning that Thorin's grandfather Thrór, and later even his son Thráin, falls to the dragon-sickness: "Thrór's love of gold had grown too fierce. A sickness had begun to grow within him; it was a sickness of the mind. And where sickness thrives, bad things will follow"[145]. Like his ancestors, Thorin is destined to the same doom: "So strong was the bewilderment of the treasure upon him, he was pondering whether by the help of Dain he might not recapture the Arkenstone and withhold the share of the reward"[146]. The term 'bewilderment' is certainly appropriate; as a modern expression, it indicates a 'mental confusion', but the original meaning is more physical and means 'to be lost in the wild'.[147] Thorin is confused, he forgets his ends, what matters to him now is just not to share the

[143] *Poetic Edda*, quoted by Tom Shippey, T*he Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 81.
[144] Ibidem.
[145] *The Hobbit: an Unexpected Journey*, Peter Jackson, New Zealand, United States, 2012.
[146] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, London: HarperCollins, 2001, ch. 17, p. 159.
[147] "bewilderment, n." OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/18472. Accessed 17 May 2018.

dragon's treasure; he is lost, stuck in the Desolation of Smaug. In 1923, Tolkien published in *The Gryphon*, the Leeds' Yorkshire college magazine, a poem called *Iumonna Gold Galdre Bewunden*, which is also line 3052 of Beowulf, translated as "the gold of ancient men, wound round with magic".[148] In his poem, Tolkien narrated the transmission of a treasure from an elf to a dwarf, then to the hero, each of them dies old and miserable, leaving the precious gold to oblivion. Beowulf too, who initially fights the dragon to protect his people, falls victim of the cursed gold, which inevitably leads him to death. As we can see greed, the great sin of modernity, has ancient origins. Having been a victim of the dragon-sickness a few pages earlier, Thorin redeems himself in the last chapters, during the Battle of the Five Armies. His run towards an overwhelming number of enemies with only a handful of companions at his back appears a heroic though imprudent endeavor. This hasty action offers a perfect representation of what Tolkien defined the Northern courage in his *Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays:* "the theory of courage, which is the great contribution of early Northern literature […] is not a military judgement […] I refer rather to the central position the creed of unyielding will holds in the North"[149]. The solidity of the will, the boldness of the heart and the strength of the spirit overcome the need of a strategy, so that Thorin ignores the difference in numbers between his company and the Orc army: "In the gloom the great dwarf gleamed like gold in a dying fire".[150] However, Thorin's sense of righteousness, just like Byrhtnoth's, makes him fall into the *ofermode* trap. Yet, according to Tolkien's concept of *eucatastrophe*, which turns bad events into good, Thorin's death provides to his army

[148] *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien,* edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, Letter 235, p. 332.
[149] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays,* edited by Christopher Tolkien, London: George Allen & Urwin, 1983, p. 8.
[150] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, London: HarperCollins, 2001, ch. 17, p. 162.

the right amount of Northern courage that gives them the strength to endure the battle. Thorin Oakenshield's character development throughout the story places him alongside Beowulf, Byrhtwold and the other heroes occupying Valhalla that have fought till the end bringing honor to their Norse and Anglo-Saxon ideals, although they were aware to be doomed to lose.

Nevertheless, the ancient concept of courage is quite in contrast with modern society: it is not represented anymore by the will to fight a dragon, which would be designed as stupid, because impossible and hopeless; what nowadays is considered courage is to fight fear itself, with a cold and moral attitude, easier to admire for a modern reader. Once more, in *The Hobbit* Bilbo Baggins acts as mediator between the ancient and the modern world. Not without reason did Tolkien put a lot of emphasis in the scene in which Bilbo goes down the tunnel that leads him to Smaug. He stops, when he hears the snoring of the dragon ahead: "Going on from there was the bravest thing he ever did. The tremendous things that happened afterwards were a nothing compared to it. He fought the real battle in the tunnel alone, before he ever saw the vast danger that lay in wait. At any rate after a short halt go on he did".[151] The modern notion of courage, inserted in *The Hobbit* by means of Bilbo, makes it easier for contemporary readers to enter Middle-earth. Another relevant quality of Baggins is his luck. When Bilbo saves the dwarfs from the Spiders, his companions notice "he had some wits, as well as luck and a magic ring-and all three are very useful possessions".[152] In ancient sagas, luck is usually something to possess, often thanks to lucky, or unlucky, magical objects. In the chapter 5 of *The Hobbit*, *Riddles in the Dark*, features Bilbo's luck in the decisive finding of the ring (not yet the powerful

[151] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, London: HarperCollins, 2001, ch. 12, p. 127.
[152] Id., ch.8, p. 89.

ring that it becomes in *The Lord of the Rings*; while Tolkien was writing *The Hobbit* in 1937 he had no idea of what the ring would have become later). Trying to escape, Bilbo challenges the fallen hobbit Gollum to a riddle contest. Many of the enigmas, as we could expect at this point, invoke ancient Northern sagas. In his letter 25 to the editor of the *Observer* Tolkien writes, "I should not be at all surprised to learn that both the hobbit and Gollum will find their claim to have invented any of them disallowed".[153] Douglas Anderson, who edited *The Annotated Hobbit*[154], found the main sources of Tolkien's riddles in the Old Norse mythology. Words contests were common in Old Norse and Old English literature; *The Exeter Book*, the largest manuscript of Anglo-Saxon poetry, contains 95 riddles.[155] According to Tolkien's letter 110, Bilbo's second riddle, about sun on the daisies, plays on the Old English word *dæges éage*, originally 'day's eye', now 'daisy', [156] while his third riddle, about egg, comes from some American Nursery Rhyme books.[157] Bilbo's fourth riddle, about no legs, is a variation of the Sphinx's riddle of Greek mythology: what animal walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening? The answer, as given by Oedipus, is man.[158] The other riddles can be find in the Bible, involving Samson (Judges 14), Solomon (Proverbs 1:6), the psalmist (Psalm 49:1), Moses (Numbers 12:8), and the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1, 2 Chronicles 9:1). Gollum's riddles come instead from ancient Northern sagas and English poems. His

[153] *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien,* edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, Letter 25, p. 39.
[154] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Annotated Hobbit*, edited by D. Anderson, London: HarperCollins, 2003, p. 119.
[155] *Anglo-Saxon Riddles of the Exeter Book*, translated by Paull F. Baum, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1963.
[156] "daisy, n." OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/46951. Accessed 17 May 2018.
[157] *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien,* edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, Letter 110, p. 143.
[158] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Annotated Hobbit*, edited by D. Anderson, London: HarperCollins, 2003, p. 126.

fourth enigma, about fish, remembers Odin's riddle in the *Saga of Hervör and Heidrek*[159] (translated from Icelandic by Christopher Tolkien in 1960 as *Saga of King Heidrek the Wise*[160]), and has some analogies with the *Brut of Layamon*[161], which Tolkien certainly knew. In this work, the dead warriors lie at the bottom of a river in their shining armors, looking like strange fish. Gollum's riddle about shadow, and his last enigma about time, come instead from the Old English poem *Solomon and Saturn*, which contains a dialogue of riddles between Solomon, the king of Israel, and Saturn, identified as a prince of the Chaldeans.

Saturn's version:

often it tryeth too the multitude of beasts,
with wet it covereth them; it breaketh the
gates of towns, it boldly goeth, it plundereth
much more than the strong man, who
leadet'i his people into the hostile dwelling,
with his treacherous foe at his will?

Saturn's version:

What creature walks the world shaking
Its firm foundations, waking sorrow
Like a grim wanderer. No star or stone,
Water or wild beast escapes its grip;
Things great and small, hard and soft,
Submit-it feasts on ground-walkers,
Sky-floaters, sea-swimmers in thousands.[162]

Gollum's version:

It cannot be seen, cannot be felt,
Cannot be heard, cannot be smelt.
It lies behind stars and under hills,
And empty holes it fills.
It comes out first and follows after,
Ends life, kills laughter.

Gollum's version:

This thing all things devours;
Birds, beasts, trees, flowers;
Gnaws iron, bites steel;
Grinds hard stones to meal;
Slays king, ruins town,
And beats mountain down.[163]

To the riddles Solomon answers with 'darkness' and 'age', Bilbo with 'shadow' and 'time'. The analogy is clear. Although Gollum's riddles are older than Bilbo's, there is

[159] William H. Green, *The Hobbit: A Journey into Maturity*, New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995, pp. 76-77.
[160] *The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise Hardcover*, edited by Christopher Tolkien, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1960.
[161] *Layamon's Brut, or Chronicle of Britain*, translated by Madden, London: The Society of Antiquaries of London, 1847.
[162] *D. Anlezark, The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn*, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2009, pp. 83-84.
[163] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, London: HarperCollins, 2001 ch.5, pp. 50-51.

again an anachronistic comparison between ancient and modern. Gollum and Bilbo are not so different: both know many riddles. That is because Bilbo is not like the other hobbits; he has not forgotten traditions, unlike the Sackville-Baggins. Analyzing the character of Gollum, Douglas Anderson, in *The Annotated Hobbit*, hypothesized that his name came from *gull*[164], the Old Norse word for 'gold', 'something precious'', 'treasure'. It is significant and not a chance that in the compound *fingr-gull* it also means 'ring'.[165]

Beorn is another character in *The Hobbit* with a peculiar name that evokes the ancient world. His name is the Old English word for 'man', which originally meant 'bear'.[166] Beorn has in fact the ability to change shape and to turn into a bear every night. He has a lot in common with Beowulf himself, whose name is commonly translated as 'bees' wolf', namely bear, and with Böthvarr Bjarki, 'little bear', a hero of the Norse *Saga of Hrólfr Kraki*.[167] Beorn's ferocity is the same of the *berserkers*, Norse warriors common in Icelandic sagas. These fighters are mentioned in a multitude of poems where they were used to go into battle wearing mail coats, from which comes their Old Norse name *Úlfheðinn*, plural *Úlfhéðnar*, wolf-coats.[168] To 'go berserk' in the Viking language is to *hamask*, to 'change form', and who could do it is typically called *hamrammr*.[169] Berserks fight indeed in a trance-like fury, they howl like wild beasts and gnaw armours and shields. According to the legends, during this state they become immune to fire and steel, but when the fever vanishes they feel weak and meek. The earliest surviving work that contains the figure of the berserk is the *Haraldskvæði saga*[170], a skaldic poem written in

[164] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Annotated Hobbit*, edited by D. Anderson, London: HarperCollins, 2003, p. 119.
[165] Tom Shippey, *Foreword*, published in *A Tolkien Compass*, edited by Jared Lobdell, Chicago: Open Court, 1975, pp. 7-11.
[166] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 91.
[167] Ibidem.
[168] R. Cleasby, and G. Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957, p. 61.
[169] Ibidem.
[170] R.I. Page, C*hronicles of the Vikings*, Canada: University of Toronto Press, p. 109.

the late 9th century by Thórbiörn Hornklofi, in honuor of King Harald Fairhair, an *Úlfhéðnar*. Snorri Sturluson wrote about berserks in his *Heimskringla*;[171] in it the wild warriors were describes as "Odin's men rushed forwards without armour, were as mad as dogs or wolves, bit their shields, and were strong as bears or wild oxen, and killed people at a blow, but neither fire nor iron told upon them. This was called Berserkergang".[172] Beorn's ferocity and rudeness is not in contrast with his good spirit; they are both features of that inner self-confidence which lays in Tolkien's theory of courage. The solitary conquest of fear and the fierce denial of it, the first habit modern, the other ancient, are central concepts to *The Hobbit*'s whole narration, which reaches its high points first with the death of Smaug and then with the Battle of the five Armies.

Smaug's name is an asterisk word, past tense of a Germanic verb **smugan*, which means 'to squeeze through a hole', as Tolkien explained in his 1938 letter.[173] Smaug is also the equivalent of an Old English magic word found in a spell, *wið sméogan wyrme* ('against the penetrating worm'), and, still in Old English, *sméagan* means 'to inquire into', as adjective, 'crafty'.[174]As often happens in Tolkien's works, a proper name describes its owner. Moreover, Smaug's conversation with Bilbo has ancient roots; in *Fáfnismál*, a poem of the *Elder Edda*, Sigurðr and the dragon Fáfnir talk while the monster is dying.[175] Like Bilbo, Sigurðr does not pronounce his own name for fear of being cursed; furthermore Smaug, like Fáfnir, tries to put Bilbo against his crowd, alerting him on the greed that gold originates. Nevertheless, as usually, Tolkien added to the legendary event

[171] Laing, Samuel, *The Heimskringla or the Sagas of the Norse Kings*, London: John. C. Nimo, 1889, p. 276.
[172] Snorri Sturluson, *The Heimskringla*, Ynglinga Saga, translated by Laing Samuel, London: Midgard Books, 1998, p. 276.
[173] *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien,* edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, Letter 25, p. 39.
[174] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 102.
[175] *The Poetic Edda*, *The Ballad of Fáfnir*, by Henry Adams Bellows, 1936, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe24.htm >

a dose of anachronistic modernity. In *The Hobbit* Smaug talks with authority, irritation, and the aggressive politeness that characterizes the British upper class. He speaks to Bilbo like a superior being, "You have nice manners for a thief and a liar"[176], but he never forgets his bestial form, "You seem familiar with my name, but I don't seem to remember smelling you before. Who are you and where do you come from, may I ask"[177]. The swing between his intelligent and animal behaviour gives Smaug his distinctive "overwhelming personality".[178] To slay the dragon is the main quest of *The Hobbit;* Tolkien had few ancient models to resolve the problem. Beowulf kills his dragon but dies in the fight; Thórr suffers the same fate in the battle against the Midgard Serpent in the Ragnarök, while Vítharr slays the monstrous wolf Fenrir by tearing up the beast apart (an implausible move for a hobbit or a dwarf). Tolkien took again inspiration from Sigurðr, who in the *Poetic Edda* killed Fáfnir using the well-known stratagem of the draconic soft underbelly.[179] Not to be too obvious and expected, to end the fight against Smaug, Tolkien adds to the ancient subterfuge a more modern element: discipline. In *The Hobbit*, the character who personifies this virtue, and who lastly kills the dragon, is Bard the Bowman.

> No fireworks you ever imagined equaled the sights that night. At the twanging of the bows and the shrilling of the trumpets the dragon's wrath blazed to its height, till he was blind and mad with it. No one had dared to give battle to him for many an age; nor would they have dared now, if it had not been for the grim-voiced man (Bard was his name), who ran to and fro cheering on the archers and urging the Master to order them to fight to the last arrow.[180]

With this last sentence, Tolkien took a modern element, namely the ethic of Waterloo contained in the traditional phrase 'to fight to the last round', and transferred it back to

[176] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, London: HarperCollins, 2001, ch. 12, p. 131.
[177] Ibidem.
[178] Id., ch. 12, p. 132.
[179] *The Poetic Edda*, *The Ballad of Fáfnir*, by Henry Adams Bellows, 1936, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe24.htm >
[180] J.R.R. Tolkien*, The Hobbit*, London: HarperCollins, 2001, ch. 14, p. 144.

ancient days. Smaug is indeed killed by the last arrow, the one Bard saved as a family heirloom for generations. The whole scene has nothing to do with the ancient berserk fury; it is based on preparation and coolness, basic elements of contemporary discipline.

Before the Battle of the Five Armies, Bard and Thorin have a diplomatic speech, which recalls the laborious legalism of *The Saga of Hrafnkell,* in which the hero asks for an appropriate compensation for the murders he has committed.[181] Bard and Thorin's dialogue is strongly in contrast with Bilbo's style of conversation, which is showed when the hobbit, disapproving of Thorin's decision, delivers the Arkenstone to Bard. While the dialogue between Bard and Thorin is full of archaic words such as 'hail', 'slain', 'foes', 'hoard', Bilbo uses modern terms as 'total' (not used in English till 1557), 'profit' (never used before 1604), 'affair', 'interest', 'matter' (all Latin and French imported into English after the Norman Conquest). No character in old epic sagas could have talked like Bilbo, with the words of a businessman. Tolkien was always fascinated by ancient ethic and the literary way of speech, so that, subsequently, he underlined the difference between the simple narrator's voice and the eloquence of Dain, second cousin to Thorin Oakenshield, who responds to Thorin's call for help during the Battle of the Five Armies.

> "We are sent from Dain son of Nain," they said when questioned. "We are hastening to our kinsmen in the Mountain, since we learn that the kingdom of old is renewed. But who are you that sit in the plain as foes before defended walls?" This, of course, in the polite and rather old- fashioned language of such occasions, meant simply: "You have no business here. We are going on, so make way or we shall fight you!"[182]

The Hobbit is a constant anachronistic opposition between modern and ancient: on the one hand there is Bilbo Baggins with his moral courage, his self-distrust, and his way of

[181] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 91.
[182] J.R.R. Tolkien*, The Hobbit*, London: HarperCollins, 2001, ch. 17, p. 160.

thinking like a businessman; on the other hand Thorin's ethic, Beorn's berserk form, and Dain's dignity, features that can be described by the Old Norse word *drengskapr*, the awareness of being a warrior.[183] Neither side is better: the contrast is on the style, without any judgment. At the end the two approaches are indeed mixed:

> Good-bye and good luck, wherever you fare!" said Balin at last. "If ever you visit us again, when our halls are made fair once more, then the feast shall indeed be splendid!" "If ever you are passing my way," said Bilbo, "don't wait to knock! Tea is at four; but any of you are welcome at any time!" Then he turned away.[184]

There is not much in common with these two forms of speech; however, they are saying the same thing.

On his way home Bilbo "had many hardships and adventures before he got back"[185], since "The Wild was still the Wild, and there were many other things in it in those days besides goblins"[186]. These words give the sensation that the story does not end with Bilbo's homecoming. Tolkien's ending stratagem leaves some clue for other adventures, like "the wicked deeds and battles which the children of men never knew clearly"[187] that Sigurðr made in *Beowulf*; or even the fights of *Sir Gawain* "with ogres that hounded him from the heights of the fells"[188]. Both imply more adventures and events about a whole world.

The Hobbit was published on 21 September 1937. It was not a surprise that, given its success, Tolkien was asked to write a sequel. All the anachronistic material in *the Hobbit* makes clear the logic behind the author: if the matter of old songs can contain a modern

[183] Ross G. Arthur, *English to Old Norse Dictionary*, Cambridge: Linguistic Series, 2002, p. 33.
[184] Id., ch. 18, p. 166.
[185] J.R.R. Tolkien*, The Hobbit*, London: HarperCollins, 2001, ch. 17, p. 167.
[186] Ibidem.
[187] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 105.
[188] *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, translated by Tolkien, J.R.R. and E.V. Gordon, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1975, p. 38.

character as Bilbo, then maybe even the prosaic events of today will sometime be matter of old songs. There is a continuity in human nature, even among dwarfs, hobbits and humans.

3.2 – *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*: A HIDDEN MAP OF ENGLAND

After *The Hobbit*, seventeen years went by before the publication of the first book of *The Lord of the Rings.* Tolkien began writing his first chapter, 'A long expected-party', without a clear idea of what would come after. The Ruling Ring was just a magical object, and the moment in which it became the focus of the narration is still not clear.[189] Probably Tolkien had no plot in mind and no idea to follow, but, as Gandalf writes in a letter addressed to Frodo, "Not all those who wander are lost".[190] What Tolkien was working on can be revealed by the major difference between *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*: the presence of names and maps. In *The Hobbit* names are only a few: there are twelve dwarfs' names, which as we have already seen come from the *Dvergatal* poem together with Gandalf; few elf-names, not so important (the name of the Elvish King is just revealed in *The Lord of the Rings*)[191]; furthermore, the only surnames in the story are Baggins, Sackville-Baggins and Took. If we add Gollum, Beorn, Elrond, Radagst, Azog, and the onomatopoeic names of the ravens Carc and Roäc, the list is completed. As regards the maps, in *The Hobbit* Tolkien just capitalized common names: Bilbo lives at the foot of The Hill, its river is called The Water, the town of the hobbits is Hobbiton, then there are the Misty Mountains, the Lonely

[189] J.R.R. Tolkien*, The return of the Shadow*, edited by Christopher Tolkien*,* London: George Allen & Unwin, 1986, p. 70.
[190] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Rings*, London: HarperCollins, 1954, book I, ch. 10, p. 222.
[191] Id., book II, ch. 2, p. 312.

Mountain, the Long Lake, Widerland, a valley called Dale and a river called Running. *The Hobbit* contains forty of fifty names; on the contrary, *The Lord of the Rings* lists in its indices 600 names of animals, monsters and people, almost the same number of places, and 200 objects with a proper name. In Tolkien's letter 144 to Naomi Mitchison, who had been reading page-proofs of the first two volumes of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien claimed, "I wisely started with a map, and made the story fit".[192] Even the characters in *The Lord of the Rings* seem to talk like historical maps: "Ere long we shall come to the mouth of the Limlight that runs down from Fangorn to join the Great River. That is the north boundary of Rohan; and of old all that lay between Limlight and the White Mountains belonged to the Rohirrim".[193]

Why did Tolkien care so much about the names of places? The answer can be found in *The Hobbit*, when Gandalf comments on Bilbo's question about Carrock's name with "He called it the Carrock, because carrock is his word for it. He calls things like that carrocks, and this one is *the* Carrock because it is the only one near his home and he knows it well."[194] Gandalf underlines a fundamental truth: modern names are arbitrary. However, it was not so at the beginning, when all names were like Gandalf and described their owner, their history and their nature.

The Ent Fangorn, also known as Treebeard, has the same name of the Fangorn Forest, whereby he is a perfect example of the strong relationship between names and things:

[192] *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien,* edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, Letter 144, p. 195.
[193] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Rings*, London: HarperCollins, 1954, book II, ch. 9, pp. 496-497.
[194] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, London: HarperCollins, 2001, ch.7, p. 72.

"my name is like a story. Real names tell you the story of the things they belong to in my language, in the Old Entish as you might say".[195]

Paying attention to the names Tolkien used, it is clear that he was making Middle-earth a calque of England. A calque, or loan translation, is a linguistic term used to describe the process in which the elements of a compound are translated root-for-root in another language, creating a new word (for example the Italian 'grattacielo' from 'skyscraper').[196] The resulting words have a totally different sound, but the influence is clear. Therefore, as the Shire, the region in which is located Bag End, is alike England, the analogies between the hobbits and English people are many. As the British come from Angeln, a peninsula located on the Baltic shore between Flensburg Fjord and Schlei, so the hobbits of Middle-earth come from the angle between Hoarwell and Loudwater. Both emigrated in three tribes, on the one hand, Angles, Jutes and Saxons, on the other hand Harfoots, Fallohides and Stoors. Furthermore, as the English were led by Hengest and Horsa, i.e. 'stallion' and 'horse', the hobbits were led by Marcho and Blanco, from Old English **marh*, 'horse', and *blanca*, 'white horse'.[197] Thus, many hobbits' names find an explanation in E. Erwall's *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*[198] or P.H. Reaney's *Dictionary of British Surnames*.[199]

In addition to the similarities between the hobbits and the English, even many of the place names of Middle-earth derive from England. Tolkien took most of the names of

[195] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Two Towers*, London: HarperCollins, 1982, book III, ch.4, p. 58.
[196] "calque, n." OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/68119. Accessed 18 May 2018.
[197] Paula Marmor, *An Introdution to Elvish*, Hayes: Bran's Head Books, 1978, p. 181.
[198] E. Erwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960.
[199] P.H. Reaney, *Dictionary of British Surnames*, Abingdon: Routledge, 1976.

the Shire from his surroundings: Nobottle in Northfarthing comes from Old English *niowe*, 'new', and *bolt*, 'house' (as in *hol-bytla*), and a Nobottle in Northamptonshire really exists.[200] Buckland is an Oxfordshire placename too, like Wetwang in Yorkshire; moreover, the rivers Gladden, Limlight and Silverlode have their English parallels.

The Shire is not the only region of Middle-earth to borrow names from the English landscape. The Rider's country is named Rohan in Gondorian, but Mark by the riders themselves. Historically north of the Wessex there was Mercia, a Latinisation of the Old English *Mierce*, 'border people, probably pronounced by the Anglo-Saxons 'Mark'.[201] Moreover, between Mercia and Wessex, it is still today possible to admire the Uffington White Horse, a prehistoric chalk figure in the hillside; a white horse is indeed the symbol of the Riders of Rohan. All the maps and the names give to Middle-earth that realism and that density Tolkien was already looking for while he was writing *The Hobbit*.

Tolkien in his letter number 205 to his son Christopher claimed, "All the same, I suddenly realized that I am a pure philologist. I like history, and am moved by it, but its finest moments for me are those in which it throws light on words and names".[202] Once again, names, maps, languages, and words, come before the story itself. Usually writers start from inspiration and then come to invention; Tolkien made the opposite journey: he began with the laborious invention of all the place names of Middle-earth,

[200] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 117.
[201] Id., p. 117.
[202] *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien,* edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, Letter 205, p. 285.

which inspired him in the same way his invented Elvish languages had done years before.

Many of Tolkien's creatures are born of the land itself, like Tom Bombadil, the Willow-man and the Barrow-wight. All of them belong to *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*, one of Tolkien's earlier poems, printed in the *Oxford Magazine* in 1934. Asking what Tom Bombadil is has no precise answer. In the book Frodo's question about his origin receives a cryptic explanation: "he is, as you have seen him"[203], "He is the Master of wood, water and hill"[204], or from Tom Bombadil himself "Don't you know my name yet? That's the only answer".[205] Tom Bombadil is a *genius loci*, originated by the English Midlands, and representing the "spirit of the (vanishing) Oxford and Berkshire countryside".[206] A peculiar feature of this character is his mysterious way to talk; Tom Bombadil in fact "sang most of the time, but it was chiefly nonsense, or else perhaps a strange language unknown to the hobbits, an ancient language whose words were mainly those of wonder and delight"[207]. Moreover, everything he says sounds as if it was in verses, falling into strongly marked two-stress phrases. His language probably is a reminder of the ancient myth of the 'true language', according to which there is a word for each thing and a thing for each word; in fact when Tom Bombadil names something, the name sticks, as happens with the hobbits' ponies, who respond to no other name for the rest of their life. Furthermore,

[203] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Rings*, London: HarperCollins, 1954, book I, ch. 7, p. 163.
[204] Idem.
[205] Id., p. 172.
[206] *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien,* edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, Letter 19, p. 32.
[207] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Rings*, London: HarperCollins, 1954, book I, ch. 8, p. 191.

according to Elrond, Tom Bombadil is the "oldest and fatherless"[208]. This title associates its character to Adam, described in the Old English poem *Genesis B* as *selfsceafte guma*, 'self-shaped man'.[209] Maybe a second model of Tom Bombadil could have been the Green Knight, who challenges Sir Gawain in the homonym poem Tolkien himself edited in 1925.

Tom's enemy is the Willow-man. He is attached to the River Withywindle, whose name comes from the term 'withy', local word for 'willow', and 'windle', *windol, 'winding brook' in Old English;[210] Withybrook is actually a rural village of Warwickshire. The description of the Withywindle in chapter 6 could represent perfectly the Cherwell, a river that joins the Thames at Oxford. Lastly, even the Barrow-wight originates from the English landscape: a great concentration of barrows stand fifteen miles from Oxford.

At the beginning of the story the descriptions steal the main role to the plot. The amount of plants in Middle-earth is huge and the characterization of sceneries are numerous throughout the whole text. Nevertheless, many readers are not satisfied with good landscapes and nature, looking just for a plot and unable to find it between the lines of Tolkien's philological path. Tolkien was aware of the fact that, unlike *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* was addressed to an adult public:

> It was not written 'for children', or for any kind of person in particular, but for itself. (If any parts or elements in it appear 'childish', it is because I am childish, and like that kind of thing myself now.) I believe children do read it or listen to it eagerly, even quite young ones, and I am very pleased to hear it, though they must fail to understand most of it, and it is in any case stuffed with words that

[208] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Rings*, London: HarperCollins, 1954, book II, ch.2, p. 345.
[209] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 122.
[210] Id., p. 123.

> they are unlikely to understand – if by that one means 'recognize as something already known'. I hope it increases their vocabularies.[211]

Moreover, critics of Tolkien's novels denounce the presence of good and evil as absolute with no sign of inner conflicts.[212] Their favorite negative observation, already introduced in previous chapters, asserts that *The Lord of the Rings* is an escapist work and its reality is just a false fable that does not mirror an adult view of the world.

To fight back these negative opinions it is useful to start analyzing the plot and its central object of the story: the powerful Ring for which the hobbits leave the Shire (with capital letter because different from the ring in *The Hobbit* that was relatively insignificant). The motif of the cursed Ring finds inspiration in Nordic mythology: in *The Völsungasaga* Sigurd takes a cursed ring from the dragon Fafnir,[213] and a cursed ring is contained also in *The Nibelungenlied.*[214] In the chapter that introduces the Ruling Ring, Gandalf says few things about it: it is immensely powerful, no one can control it without falling victim of his negative power, and it cannot be left unused or simply put aside; it must be destroyed.[215] For this reason the wizard himself refuses to take the Ring, not wanting to know what such a powerful object could do in his equally powerful hands.

> Do not tempt me! For I do not wish to become like the Dark Lord himself. Yet the way of the Ring to my heart is by pity, pity for weakness and the desire of strength to do good. Do not tempt me! I dare not take it, not even to keep it safe, unused. The wish to wield it would be too great for my strength. I shall have such need of it. Great perils lie before me.[216]

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[211] *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien,* edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, Letter 234, p. 330.
[212] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 153.
[213] *The Saga of the Volsungs: the Norse Epic of Sugurd the Dragon Slayer*, edited by Jesse L. Byock, London: Penguin Books, 1999.
[214] *The Nibelungenlied*, translated by Margaret Armour, Cambridge: In parentheses Publications, Medieval German Series, 1999, p.65.
[215] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Rings*, London: HarperCollins, 1954, book I, ch.2.
[216] Id., p. 81.

The maxim behind Gandalf's words is clear: power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. This idea was not only modern; an Anglo-Saxon proverb says "Man deþ swá hé byþ þonne hé mót swá hé wile" [Man does as he is when he may do as he wishes].[217] Even Frodo's pure heart cannot resist the negative influence of the Ring: at the end of the book he tries to destroy it but has not the strength to do it.

Frodo, exactly like Bilbo in *The Hobbit*, is not a warrior, as his name reveals. Tolkien left some clues in *The Lord of the Ring*'s appendix F:

> In some old families […] it was the custom to give high-sounding first-names. Since most of these seem to have been drawn from legends of the past, of Men as well as of Hobbits, and many while now meaningless to Hobbits closely resembled the names of Men in the Vale of Anduin, or in Dale, or in the Mark, I have turned them into those old names, largely of Frankish and Gothic origin, that are still used by us or are met in our histories.[218]

Adding that "in Hobbit-names '-a' was a masculine ending, and '-o' and '-e' were feminine",[219] probably Frodo at the beginning was Froda, from which it is not hard to find an ancient model in Northern legends. The Norse form of the word is Fróði, meaning 'the wise one',[220] and mentioned in more than one myth. Snorri Sturluson's *Ynglinga saga* (c. 1225), Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* (c. AD 1200), and the *Grottasǫngr* poem, argue that Fróði was a king, whose reign enjoyed a long peace, without wars or murders, during which even golden rings were lay untouched; this period was so called *Frótha-frith*, 'peace of Fróði'.[221] Actually, according to the *Grottasǫngr,* prosperity of the reign was produced by two giantesses, which with a magic mill ground gold and peace. Fróði

[217] *The Durham Proverbs*, edited by O.S. Arngat, Lundus: Lundus Universitets Arsskrift, 1956, vol.52, no.2.
[218] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, Wilmington: Mariner Books, 2005, Appendix F, p. 1165.
[219] Ibidem.
[220] M. Meli, *La Macina e il Telaio*, Roma: Carocci Editore, 2012, p. 28.
[221] Id., p. 31.

did not let them rest, so they revolted against him grinding a Viking army who killed the insatiable king. The legend tells that also the Vikings took advantage of the giantesses and obligated them to grind salt on a Viking boat; for revenge the giantesses produced so much salt that the boat sank. That is why the sea is salty.[222] In *Beowulf* Fróda is the father of Ingjald, who marries the Danes king's daughter to restore peace between Danes and Bards, over whom Fróda ruled; negotiations went wrong and Fróda was killed.[223] What all the versions of Fróði/Fróda have in common is a nostalgic failure, for which the figure of Fróði /Fróda becomes to Tolkien symbol of a sad truth behind heroic illusions. In *The Lord of the Rings* Frodo is a peacemaker more than a warrior, a prophet more than a hero: he threatens Gollum, but does not kill him, he also saves him from the archers against Sam's will who wants him to die. Subsequently he throws away his dagger Sting and then even the orc-blade because he assumes "I do not think it will be my part to strike any blow again".[224]

Book I and II of *The Lord of the Rings* follow a structure similar to *The Hobbit*. A group of travellers departs from a safe place and takes refuge in the elves' adobe (respectively, Rivendell and Lothlórien). During "The Council of Elrond"[225] Frodo accepts the task to bring the Ring to Mount Doom, and the Fellowship of the Ring is reunited. This chapter presents a conflict among all the different cultures and ways of speech of Middle-earth. Saruman talks like a politician in style and lexicon, using empty sentences like "deploring maybe evils done by the way", or "There need not be, there would not be, any real change

[222] M. Meli, *La Macina e il Telaio*, Roma: Carocci Editore, 2012, pp. 13-16.
[223] Id., pp. 28-29.
[224] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Return of the King*, London: HarperCollins, 1983, book VI, ch. 2, p. 112.
[225] Id., book II, ch. 2, p. 311.

in our designs, only in our means".[226] In Old English *searu* means 'device', both with negative and positive meaning.[227] Moreover, Wizards are usually called searu-þancum, 'wise in cunning thoughts', while in *Beowulf* the protagonist denies having ever used *saero-niþas*, 'cunning malice';[228] Saruman is without any doubt a cunning wizard.

The Gaffer Gamgee functions instead as an example of normality with his "I can't abide changes".[229] On the other side, all the other participants to the council sound archaic, rude and sudden. Elrond's speech is full of old-fashioned syntactic inversions and obsolete words, such as 'esquire' and 'weregild';[230] Gandalf, telling the story of Isildur, uses a lot of words with ancient endings ('loseth', 'fadeth', 'glede').[231] Aragorn's speech is modern, relaxed, even when he argues with Boromir he ends the quarrel with "we will put it to the test one day",[232] revoking the words of Ælfwine "nu maeg cunnian hwa cene sy" [now who is bold can be put to the test].[233] *The Lord of the Rings* is exactly like the council of Elrond: both have a narrative thread, but rely on the variation of speech patterns.

Like Tolkien made clear in his essay *On Fairy-stories*,[234] a good author should make its story credible. For this reason *The Lord of the Rings*, in the same way as *The Hobbit*, is littered with songs and poems belonging to the lore of Middle-earth. Their function is to create the story behind the story, that depth so dear to Tolkien.

In chapter 2 Gandalf reports an ancient poem that belonged to the elven-lore:

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[226] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Rings*, London: HarperCollins, 1954, book II, ch. 2, p. 338.
[227] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 193.
[228] Ibidem.
[229] Id., p. 342.
[230] Id., p. 136.
[231] Ibidem.
[232] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Rings*, London: HarperCollins, 1954, book II, ch. 2, p. 349.
[233] *The Battle of Maldon*, line 215, translated in *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 138.
[234] J.R.R. Tolkien, *On fairy-stories*, London: HarperCollins, 2014, p. 52.

> One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them,
> One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them
> In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.[235]

Samwise Gamgee repeats its last line in a poem a hundred and forty pages later, giving power to the idea that these verses were part of a remote legend, widely spread in Middle-earth:

> But long ago he rode away,
> and where he dwelleth none can say;
> for into darkness fell his star
> in Mordor where the shadows are.[236]

Even the elves of Gildor's company make their appearance singing a hymn to Elbereth, to drive off the enemy:

> O Elbereth! Gilthoniel!
> We still remember, we who dwell
> In this far land beneath the trees,
> Thy starlight on the Western Seas.[237]

The poem recalls the ancient time when elves were banished from Valinor, the sacred land. These matters are not explained in *The Lord of the Rings*; they are needed to provide perspective and to lay the foundation for a mythology.

Sometimes the songs contained in *The Lord of the Rings* are not even in English, such as 'The Myth of Stars and Shadows' sung in Riverdell in the elvish language Sindarin and not translated till *The Road Goes Ever On*,[238] a collection of songs published just in 1968. Tolkien had a theory, revealed since 1926 in his 'General Philology', an article written

[235] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Rings*, London: HarperCollins, 1954, book I, ch.2, p. 66.
[236] Id., ch.11, p. 243.
[237] Id., ch.3, p. 104.
[238] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Road Goes Ever On*, London: HarperCollins, 2002, p. 72.

for *The Year's Work in English Studies.* [239] He claimed there must have been a science known as *Lautphonetik*, a phonology of sounds; what Tolkien meant was an aesthetic of sound, capable to explain why certain languages were considered more beautiful than others, and why different combination of sounds produced different effects. Let us remember that Tolkien fell for Gothic just by reading a list of Gothic words in a dictionary.[240] The same happened to him with the Welsh names on coal-trucks and later with Finnish.[241] As he wrote in *English and Welsh*, Tolkien believed that the sound of the word 'cellar door' was more beautiful than the sound of 'beautiful' itself.[242] For this reason, he thought that untranslated Elvish could have produced a stronger and more fascinating effect than English.[243]

When the hobbits hear Goldor and the elves singing, they find "the sound blending with the melody seemed to shape itself in their thought into words which they only partly understood".[244] Moreover, in *The Two Towers*, second volume of *The Lord of the Rings*, Legolas listens to Aragorn singing in Rohirric, a language he does not even know; nevertheless he is able to affirm "I guess, is the language of the Rohirrim, […] for it is like to this land itself; rich and rolling in part, and else hard and stern as the mountains. But I cannot guess what it means, save that it is laden with the sadness of Mortal Men".[245] However, languages can also produce a negative effect: during the council of Elrond, Gandalf uses the Black Speech of Mordor and then "The change in the wizard's voice

[239] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 129.
[240] Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: a Biography*, London: HarperCollins, 2002, p. 58.
[241] Id., p. 43.
[242] J.R.R. Tolkien, *English and Welsh*, in *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*, edited by Christopher Tolkien, London: George Allen & Urwin, 1983, pp. 190-191.
[243] Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: a Biography*, London: HarperCollins, 2002, p. 83.
[244] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Rings*, London: HarperCollins, 1954, book I, ch. 3, p. 103.
[245] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Two Towers*, London: HarperCollins, 1982, book III, ch.6, p.104.

was astounding. Suddenly it became menacing, powerful, harsh as stone",[246] forcing the elves to cover their ears.

Tolkien wrote in a letter that in *The Lord of the Rings* "there is a great deal of linguistic matter (other than actually 'elvish' names and words) included or mythologically expressed in the book. It is to me, anyway, largely an essay in 'linguistic aesthetic', as I sometimes say to people who ask me 'what is it all about?' It is not 'about' anything but itself".[247]

Although *The Lord of the Rings* is not a real essay on linguistic, it contains certainly numerous references to many languages of England. It is clear from the beginning of *The Hobbit* that the Bagginses represent the English, and, inevitably, the story should have been written in modern English. Moreover, *The Lord of the Rings* contains no archaic word, except 'naught'. However, an archaic style is evident in the careful selection of adverbs like 'seldom' and 'yet', and in many inversions of nouns and adjective:

> 'It is ever so with the things that Men begin: there is a frost in Spring, or a blight in Summer, and they fail of their promise.' 'Yet seldom do they fail of their seed,' said Legolas. 'And that will lie in the dust and rot to spring up again in times and places unlooked-for. The deeds of Men will outlast us, Gimli.' 'And yet come to naught in the end but might-have-beens, I guess,' said the Dwarf. 'To that the Elves know not the answer,' said Legolas.[248]

Tolkien could have written everything in a modern style, but the effect would have been very different: "It's always like that with the things men start off on […] But they don't

[246] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Rings*, London: HarperCollins, 1954, book II, ch. 2, p. 331.
[247] *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien,* edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, Letter 165, p. 233.
[248] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Return of the King*, London: HarperCollins, 1983, book V, ch. 8, pp. 80-81.

often fail to propagate […] They'll still come to nothing in the end […] The elves don't know the answer to that one." As Tolkien wrote in his letter 171, he thought that:

> a real archaic English is far more terse than modern; also many of the things said could not be said in our slack and often frivolous idiom. Of course, not being specially well read in modern English, and far more familiar with works in the ancient and 'middle' idioms, my own ear is to some extent affected; so that though I could easily recollect how a modern would put this or that, what comes easiest to mind or pen is not quite that.[249]

Then hobbitic, the language of hobbits, becomes so a parallel of Modern English. Consequently, dwarfs speak Khuzdul, a language that has with Hobbitic the same relationship Modern English has with Old Norse. Having fitted in his stories Modern English and Old Norse, Old English could not be left behind. Théoden, king of Rohan, like Thengel and the rest of his dynasty, take their names from the Old English word *þeoden*, equivalent to 'lord'[250] (except Eorl the Young who takes his name from the Norse poem *Rígsþula*, in which there was no king and all the men were earl, churl or thrall).[251] Furthermore, all the names of the Riders of Rohan come from the Old English word *eoh*, 'horse', such as Éomund, Éowyn, and Éomer.[252] In the list of languages that inspired *The Lord of the Rings* Tolkien had also a place for his beloved Gothic. The names of the kings of Rohan before the dynasty of Eorl are not in Old English, as for the rest of the royal family, but in Gothic: Vidumavi, Marhwini, Vidugavia.[253] This device is extremely philological, and suggests the existence of older ages and languages belonging to the world of Middle-earth.

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[249] *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien,* edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, Letter 171, p. 140.
[250] "lord, n. and int." OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/110299. Accessed 17 May 2018.
[251] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 140.
[252] Ibidem.
[253] Id., pp. 16-17.

Beside the language, the Riders and the Anglo-Saxons have a lot in common in their procedures too, like for the severe rules to follow to approach a king. In *Beowulf*, a coastguard and then a bailiff stop the hero, who before reaching the Danish king is forced to pile all the weapons outside; the same happens to Gandalf, Legolas, Gimli and Aragorn when they want to speak with King Théoden. Furthermore, when Legolas talking about Meduseld claims "The light of it shines far over the land"[254], he is translating *Beowulf*'s verse 331 "lixte se leoma ofer landa fela";[255] Meduseld itself is a word that appears in *Beowulf* with the meaning of 'palace'.[256] In addition, Háma, doorguard of Edoras, says some pages later "Yet in doubt a man of worth will trust to his own wisdom. I believe you are friends and folk worthy of honour, who have no evil purpose. You may go in",[257] recalling verses 187-292 of *Beowulf* in which the coastguard says: "And a sharp mind will take the measure of two things: what's said and what's done. I believe what you have told me: that you are a troop loyal to our king. So come ahead with your arms and your gear, and I will guide you".[258]

Events narrated in *The Lord of the Rings* seem to be led by mysterious magical powers. The temporal coincidence between the finding of the Ring and the reviving of Sauron's power is "a strange chance, if chance it was";[259] Aragorn thinks that a superior force predestinates the course of events: "I do not think that it is our part to drive him one way or the other. Nor do I think that we should succeed, if we tried. There are other powers at

[254] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Two Towers*, London: HarperCollins, 1982, book III, ch.6, p. 103.
[255] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 141.
[256] Ibidem.
[257] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Two Towers*, London: HarperCollins, 1982, book III, ch.6, p. 108.
[258] *Beowulf*, translated by Seamus Heaney, New York: W.W. Norton, 2000, lines 287-292, p. 21.
[259] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Rings*, London: HarperCollins, 1954, book II, ch. 2, p. 326.

work far stronger".[260] It seems that the destinies of the characters are marked beforehand. In terms of individual fates, *The Lord of the Rings* is invested with an ancient point of view. The poet of *Beowulf* often ascribed events to *wyrd.* According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* it describes "the principal, power, or agency by which events are predetermined; fate, destiny".[261] The equivalent term in Old Norse is *urðr*, literally "that which has come to pass", also the name of one of the Norns, female beings who rule the destiny of gods and men.[262]

In Tolkien's symbolism image of the fate is the Road; it is made clear by *Old Walking Song*, a poem repeated three times in the novel, the first time by Bilbo, while he leaves definitely Bad End:

> Roads go ever ever on,
> Over rock and under tree,
> By caves where never sun has shone,
> By streams that never find the sea;
> Over snow by winter sown,
> And through the merry flowers of June,
> Over grass and over stone,
> And under mountains in the moon.[263]

Thereafter Frodo sings the same song, making Pippin say "That sounds like a bit of old Bilbo's rhyming".[264] Both Bilbo and Frodo are leaving Bad End, the first joyfully and without any responsibilities, the second carrying the Ring and headed to Mordor. But

[260] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Rings*, London: HarperCollins, 1954, book II, ch. 10, p. 526.
[261] "weird, n." OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/226915. Accessed 17 May 2018.
[262] *Vǫluspá*, stanza 20, edited by Marcello Meli, in *Vǫluspá. Un'apocalisse norrena*, Roma: Carocci, 2008, pp. 107-108.
[263] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Ring*, London: HarperCollins, 1954, book I, ch. 1, p. 46.
[264] Id., ch. 3, p. 96.

what was this road they both talk about? Frodo helps us to find an answer revoking Bilbo's words:

> He used often to say there was only one Road; that it was like a great river: its springs were at every doorstep, and every path was its tributary. ''It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out of your door,'' he used to say. ''You step into the Road, and if you don't keep your feet, there is no knowing where you might be swept off to.[265]

It is not hard at this point to imagine the Road as fate. However, even the road Bilbo talks about has many intersections to take or to abandon; all the heroes described by Tolkien are chosen for a mission and convened by superior powers; nevertheless, everyone makes choices of their own will.

The continuous relationship between free will and providence is an old motif, and recalls the *Solomon and Saturn* poem. In it Saturn asks which one will be stronger between "wyrd ge warnung", 'fate or foresight',[266] to which Solomon answers "Fate is hardly turned, it wandereth very nigh, it waketh grief, it loadeth sorrow, it shooteth the spirit, it beareth the javelin. And yet may the wise-minded every fate moderate for himself".[267] Free will, and the courage derived from it, are just as important as fate in Tolkien's world: "Wyrd oft nereð unfȝgne eorl, þonne his ellen deah" [Fate often spares an undoomed man when his courage avails][268] cited *Beowulf*; "Luck served you there; but you seized your chance with both hands, one might say"[269] adds Gandalf.

Although no sign of divine intervention is shown in *The Lord of the Rings*, some beneficent supernatural powers guide the heroes towards their long journey. At the

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[265] [265] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Ring*, London: HarperCollins, 1954, book I, ch. 1, p. 96.
[266] John M. Kemble, *The dialogue of Salomon and Saturnus, with an historical introduction*, London: Aelfric Society, 1848, line 887, p. 171.
[267] Id., lines 904-912, pp. 172-173.
[268] *Beowulf*, translated by Seamus Heaney, New York: W.W. Norton, 2000, lines 572-573, p. 19.
[269] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Two Towers*, London: HarperCollins, 1982, book III, ch. 9, p. 164.

beginning of *Beowulf* it is celebrated the funeral of Scyld, king of the Danes, who according to the legend came as a baby from the sea on a wooden shield. The poem recites "þonne þá dydon, þe hine æt frumsceafte forð onsendon ænne ofer ýðe umbor-wesende" [those first ones did who cast him away when he was a child and launched him alone out over the waves].[270] In the original text we find *Þonne þā dydon*, *þā* 'those', and not *hé*, 'He'.[271] In *The Silmarillion* it is revealed that Gandalf is a Maia, a spiritual creature sent by the Valar to Arda to help humanity. We have already seen how Tolkien in a letter referred to him as "angel"[272], though he has nothing in common with the Christian supernatural being. However, once again with the help of philology, we can learn that the word 'angel' comes from the Greek *angelos* with the meaning of 'messenger'[273], maybe more appropriate to its character.

On the evil side stand instead 'shadows' and 'wraiths'. Many are the ancient poems in which the word 'shadow' appears. In the Old English poem *Solomon and Saturn II* Saturn asks Solomon a question: what things were that were not? The answer contained the word *sceades*, 'shadows'.[274] *In Beowulf* , lines 705-707, the hero and his men are waiting for the monstrous man-eater Grendel. While they wait, they sleep, because "þæt wæs yldum cúþ, þæt híe ne móste, þá Metod nolde, se syn-scaþa under sceadu bregdan" [it was widely understood that as long as God disallowed it, the fiend could not bear them to his shadow-bourne].[275] In the same way Frodo fears to get caught by Sauron and to fall "under the

[270] *Beowulf*, translated by Seamus Heaney, New York: W.W. Norton, 2000, lines 44-46, p. 5.
[271] "he, pron., n.1, and adj.", OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/84893. Accessed 17 May 2018.
[272] See note 122.
[273] "angel, n." OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/7458. Accessed 17 May 2018.
[274] John M. Kemble, *The dialogue of Salomon and Saturnus, with an historical introduction*, London: Aelfric Society, 1848, line 233, p. 141.
[275] *Beowulf*, translated by Seamus Heaney, New York: W.W. Norton, 2000, lines 705-707, p. 47.

shadow",[276] and to reach a state of nothingness like the haggard king of Minas Morgul. Gandalf confirms Frodo's fears saying to him "You would have become a wraith under the dominion of the Dark Lord".[277] Shadows are absence of light, they do not exist by themselves, but you can see and perceive them; they represent exactly the evil beings in Tolkien's novel. Mordor is in fact the Black-land "where the shadows lie".[278]

'Wraith' is the second word that better characterized Tolkien's evil creatures. Searching for the word 'wraith' in the *Oxford English Dictionary* Tolkien noticed an evident contradiction: the dictionary states that wraiths are (1) an apparition or spectre of a dead person; a phantom or ghost; (2) an immaterial or spectral appearance of a living being.[279] Therefore, Wraith may be dead or alive, just as in *The Lord of the Rings* the chief Ringwraith is undead, but the other wraiths are material and immaterial: their hoods are empty, but they can ride horses and wield weapons. Regarding to its etymology, the word 'wraith' comes from the Old English *wríðan*, 'to writhe', from which derive also the words 'wrath' and 'wreath', a twisted thing, something who has been bent[280]; that was indeed what the Ringwraiths were, bent to the power of the Ring.

As for *The Hobbit*, in *The Lord of the Rings* is evident Tolkien's will to glorify the Northern theory of courage: it does not expire even when there is no hope anymore. This time the hobbits, and not ancient beings like the dwarfs, are offered as example of Northern courage. They continue to sing and to laugh, refusing to look into their obscure future. Sam on the road to Mordor has no hope, or better, "he never had any real hope in

[276] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Return of the King*, London: HarperCollins, 1983, book V, ch.1, p. 14.
[277] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Rings*, London: HarperCollins, 1954, book II, ch.1, p. 298.
[278] Id., book I, ch.2, p. 66.
[279] "wraith, n." OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/230504. Accessed 17 May 2018.
[280] Ibidem.

the affair from the beginning; but being a cheerful hobbit he had not needed hope, as long as despair could be postponed"[281]. Nevertheless, they do not abandon the path, though they know to be just powerless creatures with no inherited resources of heroic.

Characters in *The Lord of the Rings* are more serious than they are in *The Hobbit*. Frodo's mission is much more important then Bilbo's, and involves a greater degree of personal sacrifice; on the other hand, Gimli substitutes his comical siblings of *The Hobbit* looking like a typical chivalric hero. Even the evil characters turn from stupid trolls to terrifying orcs. The chapters are longer and the narrative tension increases, while the songs, which in *The Hobbit* are mere melodies for children, in *The Lord of the Rings* become elevated in epic tone and lyrical as the storyline progresses, following the mythical model of The Silmarillion, where Ilúvatar created the world by singing it.

3.3 – *THE SILMARILLION*: THE BOOK OF LOST TALES

England is the European nation with the least mythological heritage, due to the Norman Conquest in 1066. Tolkien was a passionate medievalist, and knew well that the greatest literary epic of England, excepting *Beowulf*, was generally considered to be Sir Thomas Malory's transposition of the collection of French about King Arthur, known as the Vulgate Cycle. Tolkien wondered what happened after the Romans left in 419AD, after King Harold died at Hastings in 1066; and why Englishmen would be interested in a Welsh hero, born during the Conquest and known through the French.[282] For this reason, supported by his love for poetry and his inclination to invent languages, Tolkien outlined his project thus:

[281] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Rings*, London: HarperCollins, 1954, book IV, ch.3, p. 243.
[282] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 44.

> It should possess the tone and quality that I desired, somewhat cool and clear, be redolent of our 'air' (the clime and soil of the North West, meaning Britain and the hither parts of Europe; not Italy or the Aegean, still less the East), and, while possessing (if I could achieve it) the fair exclusive beauty that some call Celtic (though it is rarely found in genuine ancient Celtic things), it should be 'high', purged of the gross, and fit for the more adult mind of a land long stepped in poetry. […] The cycles should be linked to a majestic whole, and yet leave many scope for other minds and hands, wielding paint and music and drama. Absurd.[283]

In a notebook, he wrote a title to this ambitious work: *The Book of Lost Tales*, later known as *The Silmarillion*.[284] Although *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are the titles that have made Tolkien's reputation, *The Silmarillion* was the work he cared about the most. Due to its long compositional process, Tolkien dedicated almost all his life to create this mythology. Tolkien spent almost thirty years writing the hobbit's adventures (he began writing *The Hobbit* in 1929, and in 1955 he was still writing the Appendices to *The Lord of the Rings*), and yet worked on *The Silmarillion* for more than twice as long. His *Story of Kullevro*, composed in 1914 but never published, already contained already fragments of this mythology, to which he dedicated himself until the last days of his life. Today, these texts, which represent almost sixty years of work, have been collected by Christopher Tolkien in *History of Middle-earth*, twelve volumes that retrace the entire creative process of his father. The first signs of Tolkien's mythology are in the poetry he wrote from 1914 to 1916, while he was still studying at Oxford. He collected additional material during his recovery from trench fever in October 1916; at that time Tolkien submitted in writing the material that years after his son used to construct *The Book of Lost Tales* and the first two volumes of the *History of Middle-earth.* After Tolkien found stable employment at the University of Leeds, and then at Oxford, he began to write rhymed verses about the story of Beren and Túrin Turambar, entitling them respectively

[283] *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien,* edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, Letter 131, p. 167.
[284] Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: a Biography*, London: HarperCollins, 2002, p. 126.

'the Lay of Leithian' and 'the Lay of the Children of Húrin'.[285] Both were published in the third volume of the *History of Middle-earth*. When Stanley Unwin, the editor of *The Hobbit*, asked Tolkien to write a sequel to his novel about hobbits, Tolkien sent to him part of these first drafts, but the editor rejected them because they were not about the hobbits. Looking for a sequel to *The Hobbit*, Tolkien spent the next ten years on *The Lord of the Rings*, abandoning the idea to finish *The Silmarillion*. Nevertheless, his desire to write a mythology for his country still remained, so that when *The Lord of the Rings* was completed, Tolkien turned back to his beloved project. He added more sets of annals: the 'Annals of Valinor', 'the Annals of Beleriand', 'the Annals of Aman', and 'The Frey Annals', part of what was going to be the 'Quenta Silmarillion',[286] contained respectively in the fourth, fifth, tenth and eleventh volumes of *History of Middle-earth*. Christopher Tolkien collected and ordered all his father's drafts only in 1977, when the final version of *The Silmarillion* was published, to which he added other material three years later in *Unfinished Tales*.

Between the conclusion of *The Lord of the Rings* and Tolkien's death, almost twenty years passed; so why *The Silmarillion* was left unfinished? As we have seen in the previous chapters, the literary quality Tolkien valued as the most important was the depth, "the illusion of surveying a past, pagan but noble and fraught with a deep significance, a past that itself had depth and reached backward into a dark antiquity of sorrow".[287] An example of such depth is found in the Old Norse *Völsungasaga*. It is a work with deep roots, part of a collection of ancient texts. We know that the author had access to *The*

[285] Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: a Biography*, London: HarperCollins, 2002, p. 148.
[286] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 255.
[287] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays,* edited by Christopher Tolkien, London: George Allen & Urwin, 1983, p. 12.

Long Lay of Sigurðr, a poem now lost and known only thanks to a gap in a surviving manuscript. The lost lay is similar to other three works, and thus the existence of a further poem, behind them, is supposed.[288] This is the depth Tolkien was looking for, the quality "which compensates for the inevitable flaws and imperfect adjustments that must appear, when plots motives, symbols, are rehandled and pressed into the service of the changed minds of later time".[289]

The Hobbit and *The Lord of the Rings*, like *Beowulf* and the old epic, possess a large number of ancient songs and allusions to the past (even like objects, such as the Silmaril and Melkor's Iron Crown), which give the novel the impression of a story behind the story. *The Silmarillion* starts with the beginning of everything, when Eru Ilúvatar created the world, so how could it have a sense of depth? Tolkien made this problem explicit in one of his letters, number 247, to Colonel Worskett, a reader of *The Lord of the Rings*:

> I am doubtful myself about the undertaking. Part of the attraction of The L.R. is, I think, due to the glimpses of a large history in the background: an attraction like that of viewing far off an unvisited island, or seeing the towers of a distant city gleaming in a sunlit mist. To go there is to destroy the magic, unless new unattainable vistas are again revealed.[290]

Tolkien found a solution: to pretend all the divergent texts were written by people in different times and ages, and to present the First Age as a collection of these rumors interlinked by commentary. However, this device was never put in place.

The first sections of *The Silmarillion*, *Ainulindalë* (in Sindarin 'Music of the Ainur'), and *Valaquenta* ('Tale of the Valar')[291], tell the origin of the world and elves, the first race

[288] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 354.
[289] J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, (23 April 1925), quoted by Tom Shippey in *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 356.
[290] *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien,* edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, Letter 247, p. 351.
[291] Robert Foster*, The Complete Guide to Middle-earth,* New York: Ballantine Books, 2001, p. 489.

that inhabited it. We have already seen how Tolkien refused the plural form 'dwarfs' to replace it with 'dwarves'; the same happened with the plural 'elfin', in place of which Tolkien preferred 'elves'.[292] The term 'elfin' was a pseudo medieval coinage of Edmund Spenser, quoted also in the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s citations.[293] The dictionary enraged Tolkien when it stated 'elf' was just a synonym of the term 'fairy'.[294] He knew that the Old English *ælf* was the ancestor of the modern word 'elf', related to the Old high german *alp*, the Old Norse *álfr*, and the Gothic **albs*.[295] It was used in *Sir Gawain* to describe the Green Knight as *aluisch mon*, 'uncannny creature'[296], and in *Beowulf* where the descendants of Cain include *eotenas ond ylfe ond orcnéas*, 'ettens and elves and orcs'.[297] The wide diffusion of the word in time and space demonstrates that many people had a concept of what elves were, and even believed in them. What everyone agreed about, whether in England, Norway, Iceland or Germany, was that these creatures were extremely complicated, and paradoxical. It was hard to judge if they were good or evil, but they were certainly frightening. The *Beowulf*-poet states they are descendants of Cain in the Bible, son of Adam, who committed the first murder; in *Sir Gawain* they appear scary but not evil (the Green Knight, who is referred to as elf, leaves Gawain alive and is a fair warrior). From the Icelanders we learn it is not a good idea to offer sacrifices to them, but from Anglo-Saxon that it was good to satisfy them, to keep from getting *wæterælfádl*, the 'water-elf disease' (maybe dropsy), or even *ælfsogoða*, the lunacy.[298]

[292] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 64.
[293] Id., pp. 64-65.
[294] Ibidem.
[295] "elf, n.1." OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/60431. Accessed 17 May 2018.
[296] M. Andrew, and R. Waldron, *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, University of Exeter Press, 2007, line 681, p. 233.
[297] *Beowulf*, translated by Seamus Heaney, New York: W.W. Norton, 2000, line 112, p. 9.
[298] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 66.

Moreover, elves were known for their 'elf-shot', linked to prehistoric flint arrows.[299] Another distinctive feature of these creatures is their seduction technique. In Anglo-Saxon, the term *Ælfscýne*, 'elf-beauty' was used to show appreciation of a woman; in the same way the Icelanders used *fríð sem álfkona*, 'fair as an elf-woman'.[300]

Furthermore, many songs and narrations see the elves as perpetrators in abduction stories; known examples include the anonymous Scottish ballads *Thomas the Rhymer* and *Lady Isabel*, the medieval novel *Sir Launfal*, the beginning of Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, which plays on elves' sexual desire, and even Goethe's poem *Erlkönig*, among many others. Therefore, fright and persuasion coexist in elves. Even Sam Gamgee in Tolkien's novel, looking at Galadriel, an elvish queen, claims "I don't know about perilous" adding then,

> 'It strikes me that folk takes their peril with them into Lurien, and finds it there because they've brought it. But perhaps you could call her perilous, because she's so strong in herself. You, you could dash yourself to pieces on her, like a ship on a rock; or drownd yourself, like a hobbit in a river. But neither rock nor river would be to blame'.[301]

A third characteristic that united the perception of elves in all countries was the unusual flow of time in their realm. When a man came back from the land of elves, he was temporally disoriented: time flowed faster and so two nights in Elf-land might be two years outside, or it could stop, as in the Danish ballad *Elverhøj*.[302] Once again, in *The Lord of the Rings* Sam Gamgee has the sensation that they stayed in Lothlórien, the

[299] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 66.
[300] Id., pp. 66-67.
[301] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Two Towers*, London: HarperCollins, 1982, book IV, ch.5, pp. 288-289.
[302] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 68.

elvish hill, three nights, but never a whole month.[303] Legolas tries to clarify this distorted time flow to the confused Sam:

> 'Nay, time does not tarry ever,' he said; 'but change and growth is not in all things and places alike. For the Elves the world moves, and it moves both very swift and very slow. Swift, because they themselves change little, and all else fleets by: it is a grief to them. Slow, because they need not count the running years, not for themselves. The passing seasons are but ripples ever repeated in the long long stream. Yet beneath the Sun all things must wear to an end at last.'[304]

Through its character Tolkien found a way to harmonise the two movements of the world, "both very swift and very slow".[305] However, questions about these mysterious creatures do not end here. Tolkien made an effort to reconstruct elves, taking in all the variant ideas, available evidences, and even rumors and prejudices, to create his precious depth.

In the same way as the characters, languages and places of *The Lord of the Rings* represent a loan translation of the history of England, *The Silmarillion* may be a calque of the *Genesis B*. As happens with a calque, a familiar structure adds new material.

It is important to remember that Tolkien was Catholic and had no wish to go against something he accepted as universal truth. For this reason, Tolkien introduced the human race as arriving almost by accident from the East in Beleriand, a region of northwestern Middle-earth. It was supposed they moved because something terrible happened, but there is no mention in the book of this disastrous event. In this way, it is possible to suppose that the cause of human diaspora in Middle-earth was the same as in Genesis: that is the seduction of Adam and Eve by the serpent.

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[303] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Rings*, London: HarperCollins, 1954, book II, ch.9, p. 506.
[304] Id., p. 506.
[305] Ibidem.

This is not the only theme *The Silmarillion* and the *Genesis B* have in common, as both texts deal with a rebellion against a god and the subsequent fallen. What differentiates the story of Tolkien's elves from the story of humanity is that elves are immortal; they need no Savior to rescue them from Hell or to send them to Heaven, since when they die they are sent to the 'Halls of Mandos', from which they may return. As Tolkien discussed in *On Fairy-stories*, if humans in their fantasy novels tried to escape death, in fairytales elves escaped immortality. One significant example is the tale of Beren and Lúthien, in which the elf Lúthien is allowed to leave the world like a mortal, and thus definitely die.[306]

Many wonder whether elves have a soul, if they are unable to die. An answer is contained in the Scottish tale *The Woman of Peace and the Bible*, in which an elf woman approaches an old man who is reading the Bible. The elven woman asks the man if there is any hope for her in holy Scripture, but the man replies that there is not mention of other creatures in the Bible, other than the sinful sons of Adam. In desperation, the young elf thus hurls herself into the sea. [307] Tolkien did not want to go against his religion, but found it very unfair that heroes like Aragorn or Beowulf, who whom Christianity has not been introduced, could not be saved. Therefore, Tolkien decided to search for a model that functioned as a middle path, finding it in a Middle English hagiographic manuscript, *The Early South English Legendary* (3rd part of St. Michael), written in about 1250. The idea expressed by the poet was that both good and evil spirits go to Earth to corrupt or protect men, but there is also a neutral faction:

> And ofte in fourme of wommane: in many derne weye
> grete compaygnie men i-seoth of heom: boþe hoppie and pleiȝe,
> Þat Eluene beoth i-cleopede: and ofte heo comiez to toune,
> And bi daye muche in wodes heo beoth: and bi niȝte ope heiȝe dounes.

[306] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, p. 230.
[307] J.F. Campbell, *Popular Tales of the Western Highlands*, vol.2, edited by Paisley A. Gardner, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1890, p. 75.

> Þat beoth Þe wrechche gostes: Þat out of heuene weren i-nome,
> And manie of heom a-domesday: ȝeot schullen to reste come.
>
> [And often men see great numbers of them, shaped like women, dancing and sporting on many dark paths. These are called Elves, and often they come to town, and by day they are usually in the woods, by night on high hills. Those are the wretched spirits that were taken from Heaven. And at Doomsday many of them shall still come to rest][308]

It is surprising how much these verses retrace the story of *The Silmarillion.* Moreover, the idea that some of the elves dwell in Earthly-Paradise and some on Earth is also present in the manuscript. Likewise, in *The Silmarillion*, some elves dwell in Valinor and some in Arda. In conclusion, Tolkien's elves have a lot in common with St. Michael's neutral creatures: they have been involved in a 'Fall', are linked to Earthly-Paradise, and cannot die till the end of the world. Furthermore, their fate on Doomsday is unsure, given that "the Valar declared to the Elves in Valinor that Men shall join in the Second Music of the Ainur; whereas Ilúvatar has not revealed what he purposes for the Elves after the World's end".[309]

The Silmarillion is clearly based on the Christian myth of the Fall and Redemption. A natural question comes out: what was the elves' sin? If Adam and Eve were overly proud, elves were avid, wishing to create things in which to reproduce themselves. In *The Silmarillion*, Vala Aulë creates dwarfs without permission from Eru Ilúvatar, the supreme being of the universe; in the same way Fëanor forges the Silmarils, and during the creation of the world "it came into the heart of Melkor to interweave matters of his own imagining that were not in accord with the theme of Ilúvatar".[310] The fall of the Noldor recalls another ancient work: the Anglo-Saxon poem *Maxims I*, according to which the origin of

[308] St. Michael, *The Early South English Legendary*, ed. C. Horstmann, Early English Text Society, Original Series 87, lines 253-8.
[309] J.R.R. Tolkien*, The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, p. 37.
[310] Id., p. 19.

evil is led back to Abel and Cain and to metallurgy. The elvish Fall is thus a consequence of their keener interest in their own creations than in those of God. Tolkien felt probably like Fëanor: to him his novels were as precious as the Silmarils to the Ñoldorin elf, and he could not help but feel a strong desire to sub-create. To Tolkien it would have been fair to call the *Pearl*-poet a 'jeweller'.[311]

As well as Genesis, another ancient Northern legend and folk-tradition influenced Tolkien's mythology. As stated in Tolkien's letter 75, the most significant source of Tolkien's mythology was the Finnish language and its literature;[312] in first place *Kalevala*, a 19th-century work of epic poetry compiled by Elias Lönnrot and regarded as the national epic of Karelia and Finland. Quenya looks exactly like Finnish in its linguistic style, while the names of Ilúvatar and the Vala Ulmo are a clear reference to *Kalevala*'s characters, Ilmatar and Ilmo. Moreover, the Valar, angel-like spirits Ilúvatar created to help him to shape the world, take their name from Finnish *vala*, meaning 'bond'.[313] The similarities do not end here. The Silmarils, the objects around which the whole story is built, clearly recalls the riddle of the *sampo.* In *Kalevala*, the *sampo* was manufactured by the smith Ilmarinen as payment for a bride, but was stolen and broken in the pursuit. Because of its irrevocable lost, no one could tell what the *sampo* was. What it is possible to learn through the text is that the *sampo* was bright, of great value, and perhaps, as some Finnish singers thought, consisted of the fragments of poetry, the true prosperity of

[311] M. Andrew, and R. Waldron, *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, University of Exeter Press, 2007, line 66, p. 252.
[312] *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien,* edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, Letter 75, p. 99.
[313] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 275.

Suomi.[314] Tolkien would have dearly loved to spread the Silmarils' fragments and to give back to his country all the legends lost after the Norman Conquest.

A great part of *The Silmarillion* therefore has its roots in ancient scripture. However, one of Tolkien's favourite episodes is not a calque or adaption from an old legend, rather, the tale of Beren and Lúthien comes from the vision of his wife dancing.

> I never called Edith Lúthien – but she was the source of the story that in time became the chief pan of the Silmarillion. It was first conceived in a small woodland glade filled with hemlocks at Roos in Yorkshire. […] In those days her hair was raven, her skin clear, her eyes brighter than you have seen them, and she could sing – and dance.[315]

Tolkien cared much about Beren and Lúthien and wrote their story many times over. In 1917 it was 'The Tale of Tinúviel', then in 1925 it became the poetry 'Light as Leaf on Lindentree', rewritten as Aragon's song in *The Fellowship of the Ring,* and subsequently as 'The Lay of Leithian' in 1930, before being written as the numerous versions collected by Christopher Tolkien. Even if the origin of Beren and Lúthien was pure inspiration, during its construction, Tolkien was not able to forget the older literature that he liked so much. The *Völsungasaga* provided inspiration for the werewolves, which feed on tied men in the wood, the motif of a hand in the mouth of the wolf comes from the *Prose Edda,* and finally the idea of a wizards' singing contest comes from *Kalevala.*[316]

Nevertheless, the work that mainly inspired Tolkien's story of Beren and Lúthien was the Welsh *Mabinogion*, the earliest prose stories of the literature of Britain. [317] Many are the similarities between Tolkien's tale and the story of Culhwch and Olwen contained in the *Mabinogion*: both enlist the aid of great kings, Arthur and Finrod; both show rings that

[314] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 276.
[315] *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien,* edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, Letter 340, p. 463
[316] Id., pp. 294-295.
[317] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 294.

prove their identities; both accept the impossible task to hunt and kill ferocious beasts (the wild boars, Twrch Trwyth and Ysgithrywyn, and the wolf Carcharoth); both are helped by a hound (Cafall and Huan). Even the central motif of the rash promise unites the two male heroes, who fall both for the beauty of immortal maidens. In *The Silmarillion* the oath of Thingol provokes a corresponding oath from Beren: "Bring to me in your hand a Silmaril from Morgoth's crown; and then, if she will, Lúthien may set her hand in yours";[318] to which Beren responds "when we meet again my hand shall hold a Silmaril from the Iron Crown".[319] It is obvious to the reader that Thingol's words are simply an attempt to commit murder without breaking his previous oath to do not kill Beren. Thingol's death becomes an analogy of his descent into greed; this is how fate and doom worked in Tolkien's world.

Both these words are not used anymore in Modern English due to their etymology. 'Fate' derives from Latin *fari*, 'to speak', which originally indicated 'what has been spoken by gods'.[320] On the contrary, 'doom' comes from the Old English *dóm*, related to the verb *déman*, 'to judge';[321] the Old English *dómesdæg* defined Judgment Day, the Doomsday in Modern English. Both 'fate' and 'doom' presuppose a divine being that controls the destiny of mortals by its words and sentences. In 'The Tale of Beren and Lúthien", the word 'fate' has two meanings. On the one hand, 'fate' indicates an entity that protects and leads ("his fate led him in the end"[322] or "fate saved the sons of Fëanor");[323] on the other,

[318] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, p. 213.
[319] Ibidem.
[320] "fate, n." OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/68488. Accessed 17 May 2018.
[321] "doom, v." OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/56806. Accessed 17 May 2018.
[322] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, p. 213.
[323] Id., p. 247.

a personal possession ("fate that was laid on him").[324] The term 'doom' is more complicated. 'Doom' can suggest, like 'fate', a superior power ("as she looked on him, doom fell upon her"),[325] however, according to his original meaning, it also expresses a judgment ("my doom is law").[326] All these interpretations coexist in *The Silmarillion,* in which fate and doom are connected to the ancient qualities of pride, chance and volition. A good example is the Norse *Saga of Gísli Súrsson*, in which by chance, Gísli does not the massagers who try to warn him, but in any case refuses to turn back because of his pride, despite the threat of his brother-in-law, and consequently at the end his killed.[327] In such a scenario, personal will and divine power cooperate to write the destiny of man.

Another character in *The Silmarillion* is a victim of 'doom'. Túrin is son of Húrin, whose family has been cursed by Morgoth. In his youth, Túrin loses his sister Lalaith, whose name in Sindarin means 'laughter',[328] and after her death Túrin hardly ever laughs. In losing his sister, Túrin also loses part of his personality. The same happens in the Norse *Saga of Egill Skallagrímsson,* in which in each generation there is a beautiful, fair, and joyful brother, like Thorolfr, and an ugly, big and bald one, like Egill. The death of the handsome brother triggers the ogre nature of the other. Nevertheless, Túrin survives, to the ruin of his family. The elvish king Thingol adopts him, and Túrin marries a lost woman, before killing himself with his own Black Sword of Beleg after discovering she is his sister. Once again, *Kalevala* serves as root to this tale, in which Kullervo, like Túrin, asks his own sword to drink his blood; to which it answers "Wherefore at thy heart's desire/ Should I not thy flesh devour,/ And drink up thy blood so evil?/ I who guiltless

[324] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, p. 210.
[325] Id., p. 209.
[326] Id., p. 162.
[327] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 291.
[328] Id., p. 302.

flesh have eaten,/ Drunk the blood of those who sinned not?".[329] Túrin gives himself the name of 'Turambar', 'Master of Doom', but in his epitaph appears *Túrin Turambar turún' ambartanen*, 'Master of Doom, by Doom mastered'.[330] *The Silmarillion* contains just a short version of the complete story of Túrin collected by Christopher Tolkien in *The Book of Lost Tales* as 'Narn i Chîn Húrin', 'The Children of Húrin'.

Like many characters in Tolkien's novels, Túrin is a hybrid: his mother comes from the house of Bëor, the members of which are clever, dark and moved to pity; his father from the house of Hador, which consists of blond men quick to anger and laughter (according to stereotypes, they might retrospectively represent the Celtic and Germanic races). The pride Túrin inherits from his mother makes him refuse Thingol's forgiveness and slowly leads to his death. The belief that heredity affects the temperament of a person follows the Norse convention. Norse Sagas introduce characters by listing their ancestors, as a shorthand for their natures and characters in coming into the story. Tolkien closely followed this procedure with his numerous family trees and clear descriptions. He divided the 'Elves of the Light' into three families: Noldor, Vanyar, and Teleri. Fëanor is pure Noldor, and from the beginning he is described as "the mightiest in skill of word and of hand, more learned than his brothers; his spirit burned as a flame".[331] Fëanor's father, after the death of Fëanor's mother, marries an elf of the Vanyar, who births Fingolfin and Finarfin, who are both superior to Fëanor in generosity and moderation. In turn, Finarfin marries an elf of the Teleri, so his children are nicer than both pure Noldor Fëanor's and half-Noldor Fingolfin's children. In Tolkien's novels, family trees are not only schemes

[329] *Kalevala: The Land of the Heroes*, translated by W. Forsell Kirby, Los Angeles: HardPress Publishing, 2012, p. 481, lines 330-334.
[330] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1999, p. 293.
[331] Id., p. 65.

but shape story and characters, and in forgetting them, *The Silmarillion's* structure loses much of its sense.

The Silmarillion is very different from Tolkien's previous novels. In first place, it is not a common romance. Such novels usually tell the story of a main character, such as Bilbo or Frodo. Moreover, in romances, the author is omniscient and has control of the narration. On the contrary, *The Silmarillion* appears as a tale which relates historical events. The tale does not require a comic character like Bilbo or Samwise Gamgee, because its function is not to please children. Rather, *The Silmarillion* aims to recover ancient virtues, to which modern readers aspire no longer.

CONCLUSION

I will conclude by talking a little about the Old English poet Cædmon. Cædmon is generally recognized as the father of Christian English poetry, the earliest English poet whose name is known. According to the *Historia ecclesiastica* by the Venerable Bede, Cædmon's story begins in the year 680, when an angel appears to the illiterate cowherd, after which he is miraculously able to sing. Almost fifty years later, Bede translated in Latin part of Cædmon's lines in the *Historia.*[332] However, someone else, not satisfied with Bede's work, added to it nine verses in Old Northumbrian, probably because he remembered the famous Cædmon's lines.[333] These verses were also translated into West Saxon and into Old English, at the behest of King Alfred, but were later forgotten. Hundreds of years later they have been rediscovered. However, Cædmon's original verses, except the nine lines written by a devotee, have been totally lost. Nevertheless, even if the words are not the same, someone has handed down something of Cædmon literary style and spirit, as Bede indicates in his comment:

> Whatever he learned of religious letter through men of books, he adorned in poetic language with the greatest sweetness and inspiration and bought forth well composed in the English language. And because of his songs in verse, the minds of many men were often kindled into contempt of the world and into joining the heavenly life. And likewise, too, many others after him in the English nation began to compose religious songs.[334]

To apply these words to Tolkien is an easy task: many after him started to write their own fantasy novels and to sub-create entire worlds. In this respect another of Bede's

[332] Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, Colgrave and Mynors, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969, Book IV, Chapter 24.
[333] Richard North, Joe Allard, Patricia Gillies, *Longman Anthology of Old English, Old Icelandic, and Anglo-Norman Literatures*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2011, p. 459.
[334] Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, quoted by Richard North, Joe Allard, Patricia Gillies, *Longman Anthology of Old English, Old Icelandic, and Anglo-Norman Literatures,* Abingdon: Routledge, 2011, p. 460.

comments about Cædmon is thus also true of Tolkien: '*ac nænig hwæðre him þæt gelice don ne meahte'* [but just the same, none of them could do it like him].[335]

[335] Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, quoted by Richard North, Joe Allard, Patricia Gillies, *Longman Anthology of Old English, Old Icelandic, and Anglo-Norman Literatures,* Abingdon: Routledge, 2011, p. 466.

SUMMARY IN ITALIAN

La parola *fantasy* risale al 14° secolo e deriva dal francese antico *fantasie*, giunto tramite il latino dalla parola greca *phantasia*, 'immaginazione'. Oggigiorno il termine *fantasy* identifica un genere narrativo che raccoglie storie di pura immaginazione, ambientate in inverosimili reami abitati da esseri altrettanto irrealistici, come fate, elfi e draghi.

J.R.R. Tolkien, scrittore, poeta, filologo e professore inglese, ha donato al genere numerosi racconti. La peculiarità di questo scrittore risiede principalmente nel suo essere filologo, e prima ancora grande amate delle lingue. All'età di sette anni, influenzato dai racconti scritti da Andrew Lang su Sigurðr e il drago Fáfnir, Tolkien iniziò già a scrivere le sue prime storie di fantasia. Sin da quando era piccolo il suono e la forma delle parole esercitavano su di lui un irresistibile fascino; esplicativo è l'episodio biografico nel quale rimase profondamente incantato dalle parole gallesi riportate su alcuni camion, pur non sapendo come leggerle o pronunciarle. Inoltre all'età di undici anni Tolkien parlava con fluidità sia il greco che il latino e conosceva a memoria i versi di Chaucer in Medio Inglese.

Tuttavia la sua più emozionante scoperta fu il gotico. Al giovane Tolkien non bastava però comprendere l'antica lingua, provò infatti a creare da sé le parole che mancavano al vocabolario gotico, a causa dell'esiguo numero di vocaboli sopravvissuti. Il posteriore studio del finnico guidò Tolkien verso la creazione del Quenya e del Sindarin, le due lingue elfiche che furono alla base di ogni suo racconto. Lo scrittore inglese inventò, o meglio, in conformità con l'originale significato della parola latina *invenire* (trovare), rinvenne la Terra di Mezzo proprio a partire delle sue lingue. In numerose lettere Tolkien afferma che per lui i nomi venivano molto prima delle storie.

Il filologo inglese era però in disaccordo con la definizione semplicistica del termine *fantasy*, che lo relegava perlopiù ad un'infantile letteratura per bambini Nel suo saggio *On Fairy-stories* Tolkien cercò di ridefinire il termine e di fornire una guida per chi in futuro avesse voluto scrivere la propria storia di fantasia. Lo scrittore inglese si mostrò contrariato dalla definizione semplicistica del termine *fantasy* contenuta nell'*Oxford English Dictionary* (al quale egli stesso lavorò per un periodo), la quale identificava il genere come (a) una storia di fate; (b) una storia irrealistica; (c) una bugia. Per il filologo inglese il *fantasy* più che una storia sulle fate era invece una storia sulla creazione del loro regno, la quale era strettamente legata all'uso delle parole.

L'uomo stabilisce una connessione con gli oggetti dando ad essi un nome; nominando una cosa crea nella sua mente l'immagine del suo referente. Rendere quanto più possibile reale questo referente è il compito di un bravo scrittore. Nel suo saggio Tolkien parla di *sub-creazione*, come l'atto del creare un Mondo Secondario, all'interno del quale le leggi del Mondo Primario non hanno alcun valore. Più il Mondo Secondario è ricco di dettagli, più esso diventa realistico. Non a caso i racconti di Tolkien sono caratterizzati da lunghissime descrizioni e posseggono una quantità enorme di riferimenti a leggende e storie antiche. Esse creano un collegamento con il passato che fornisce alle opere del filologo inglese quella che per lui era la più grande qualità letteraria: la profondità. I richiami a composizioni del passato sono numerosissimi e spesso celati dietro semplici parole, le quali, se ascoltate con attenzione, hanno anch'esse numerose storie da raccontare.

Questa tesi ha lo scopo di analizzare tre dei principali racconti di Tolkien, *Lo Hobbit*, *Il signore degli Anelli* e *Il Silmarillion,* prestando attenzione ai riferimenti filologici in esse contenuti.

La nostra analisi potrebbe iniziare da una curiosa parola come ‘hobbit’. Nemmeno Tolkien sapeva con esattezza cosa essa identificasse quando trascrisse quasi casualmente sul compito lasciato in bianco da un suo studente “In un buco sotto terra viveva uno Hobbit”. Eppure, in quanto filologo, avrebbe dovuto trovare una ragione a quella parola, perché nessun nome era privo di un significato. Nell’ultima appendice de *Il Signore degli Anelli* Tolkien scrisse che il termine ‘hobbit’ derivava dall’Anglosassone **hol-bytla*, ‘abitante di buche’. La sua conclusione rendeva la parola in linea con la sua origine linguistica; magari degli esseri simili agli hobbit sarebbero potuti esistere un tempo lontano, probabilmente imparentati con i conigli, (anche se Tolkien rigettò con prepotenza l’osservazione dei critici). La parola ‘hobbit’ si era infatti fatta strada nella lista dei nomi delle creature comparse già in testi antichi come elfi, nani e orchi, proprio come la parola ‘rabbit’, apparsa in inglese non prima del 1398, era stata inserita nella lista degli altri nomi di animali già conosciuti. Tolkien non apprezzava la parola ‘rabbit’ per via della sua origine non inglese, (allo stesso modo nei suoi scritti evitò di utilizzare la parola ‘tabacco’, sostituendola con ‘pipeweed’, erba-pipa). Il filologo inglese costruì quindi gli hobbit proprio a partire dall’origine della parola stessa. Allo stesso modo altri nomi contenuti nel romanzo *Lo Hobbit* raccontano tacitamente la storia dei loro possessori.

I nani sono citati in numerose saghe del passato. Il loro nome comune deriva dall’antico norreno *dvergr*, rinvenuto in inglese antico come *dweorh*, in antico tedesco *twerg*, e in gotico **dvairgs*. Per la forma plurale Tolkien preferì ‘dwarves’ all’attuale ‘dwarfs’ in quanto il suffisso –ves formava in origine i nomi plurali (come per life/lives e altri pochi nomi che non si adeguarono al plurale in –s introdotto dopo la conquista normanna del 1066). Per quel che riguarda le loro caratteristiche principali, i nani di Tolkien si

ispirarono sicuramente a quelli dei fratelli Grimm, dai quali presero la loro associazione con miniere ed oro, e a quelli di Snorri Sturluson che nel *Hjaðningavíg*, uno dei poemi contenuti nell'*Edda in prosa*, li presenta come profondamente orgogliosi. Inoltre dall'anonima *Edda poetica* risale la loro collocazione ai piedi della montagna, come anche tutti i nomi propri dei nani presenti ne *Lo Hobbit* (ad eccezione di Balin, citato da Malory in *Le Morte d'Arthur*). Nella lista dell'*Edda poetica* è presente anche il nome di Gandalf (inizialmente chiamato da Tolkien Bladorthin). Esso è un composto norreno formato da *gandr*, 'bastone' e *álfr*, 'elfo', sebbene Gandalf non sia un elfo, ma neppure propriamente un umano (la sua origine viene svelata successivamente ne *Il Silmarillion*).

Tramite i suoi racconti Tolkien voleva riportare alla luce leggende e valori del passato. Per lo scrittore inglese risultava però difficile far apprezzare ai lettori a lui contemporanei gli arcaici valori nordici, i quali avrebbero probabilmente trattato l'eccessivo eroismo di Beowulf con profonda ironia. Per questo inserì ne *Lo Hobbit* un personaggio come Bilbo Baggins che fungesse da mediatore tra il mondo antico e quello moderno. La famiglia Baggins, e più nello specifico Bilbo con il suo complesso modo di parlare e il suo amore per una vita ordinaria, è un chiaro riferimento alla borghesia inglese (Gandalf intende infatti trasformarlo da un 'bourgeois' ad un 'burglar'). Il piccolo hobbit è esterno al mondo antico dei nani, eppure ne prende parte perché ne ha conservato le tradizioni, a differenza dei suoi cugini Sackville-Baggins che aggiunsero al proprio nome il suffisso francese -ville. Bilbo conosce infatti numerosi vecchi indovinelli, grazie ai quali riesce a sfuggire all'affamato Gollum. Il motivo della battaglia di indovinelli è anch'esso molto antico e menzionato in numerose opere come l'*Exeter Book* che ne raccoglie 95, la *Saga di Hervör e Heidrek*, o ancora il poema anglosassone *Solomon and Saturn*, dal quale provengono numerosi degli indovinelli posti da Gollum. Eppure lo hobbit non appartiene

al mondo antico: non mai visto prima d'ora un berserk, (una razza di selvaggi guerrieri citati in numerose saghe come la *Saga di Hrólfr Kraki*, la *Saga di Haraldskvæði*, *l'Heimskringla* di Snorri o il *Beowulf*); né sa nulla della *drengskapr*, la consapevolezza di essere un guerriero citata nelle saghe islandesi, o dell'*ofermode*, l'eccessivo orgoglio caratteristico del coraggio nordico evidente nella *Battaglia di Maldon* e che porterà Thorin a scagliarsi contro i nemici pur sapendo di esser destinato a morte certa, (esattamente come Beowulf nel suo ultimo scontro con il drago).

Un drago è presente anche ne *Lo Hobbit*. Smaug, il cui nome proviene dal verbo proto-germanico **smugan*, 'stringersi per passare attraverso un buco', ha come modello non solo il drago del *Beowulf*, ma anche Fáfnir, temuto nemico di Sigfrido. Come Fáfnir, Smaug tenta infatti di estorcere a Bilbo il suo nome per poterlo maledire, e muore colpito da Bard sul ventre, secondo le leggende unica parte vulnerabile di un drago.

Sebbene altrettanto ricco di riferimenti a saghe antiche, *Il Signore degli Anelli* si mostra in prima istanza come una mappa storica dell'Inghilterra. Mentre *Lo Hobbit* conta in tutto una ventina di nomi propri, l'indice de *Il Signore degli Anelli* riporta 600 nomi propri, altrettanti toponimi e circa 200 nomi di misteriosi oggetti. Se Tolkien aveva iniziato a scrivere il suo primo racconto a partire da una strana e misteriosa parola come 'hobbit', nello scrivere *Il Signore degli Anelli* partì invece dai toponimi, creando la mappa della Terra di Mezzo ancora prima della storia. Le analogie tra i luoghi e gli abitanti inglesi e quelli del mondo di Tolkien sono numerose: come gli Angli anche gli Hobbit provenivano dall'Anglia guidati dai fratelli Marcho e Blanco, (che richiamano i nomi di Hengest e Horsa, dall'inglese antico **marh*, 'cavallo', e *blanca*, 'cavallo bianco'); entrambi si divisero in tre tribù, Angli, Juti e Sassoni da una parte, Paloidi, Pelopiedi e Sturoi dall'altra. Inoltre le citate Nobottle e Buckland sono città realmente esistenti

nell'Oxfordshire. Anche Mark, la patria dei Cavalieri di Rohan, è un riferimento alla Mercia anglosassone, e un calco rappresentante un cavallo bianco, simbolo di Rohan, divide realmente la Mercia dal regno del Wessex.

Molte delle creature presenti ne *Il Signore degli Anelli* nascono proprio dal paesaggio, come Tom Bombadil, il Vecchio Uomo Salice e lo Spettro dei Tumuli: il primo è definito da Tolkien come *genius loci*, originato dalle campagne inglesi, il secondo legato al fiume Sinuosalice, il terzo deriverebbe da una grande concentrazione di tumuli nei pressi di Oxford. Tutti questi richiami alla realtà forniscono alla Terra di Mezzo la verosimiglianza ce Tolkien cercava di ottenere già nel *Lo Hobbit*.

All'inizio de *Il Signore degli Anelli* le lunghe descrizioni del paesaggio rubano il ruolo centrale della storia alla trama incentrata sull'anello. Il tema dell'anello maledetto è riportato in numerose saghe antiche, come la *Saga dei Völsungar* o *Il canto dei Nibelunghi*. Sarà compito di Frodo portare l'anello al Monte Fato e distruggerlo. Frodo, come Bilbo, non è affatto un guerriero. Il suo nome deriva dalla forma norrena Fróði riportata da Snorri Sturluson nella *Saga degli Ynglingar,* e nel *Gróttasöngr*, con il significato di 'il saggio'.

Come *Lo Hobbit* anche *Il Signore degli Anelli* contiene numerose poesie e canzoni che hanno lo scopo di dar profondità all'opera; spesso esse non sono neppure tradotte in inglese, ma trascritte direttamente in elfico. Questo perché Tolkien credeva nell'estetica dei suoni, secondo la quale le parole in combinazioni e lingue diverse producevano effetti diversi. Nel suo saggio *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* il filologo inglese sosteneva che il suono di 'cellar-door' fosse più bello di quello della parola 'beautiful' stessa. Questa teoria viene convalidata anche da alcuni dei suoi personaggi come ad

esempio Legolas, che ascoltando Aragorn cantare in Rohirric, una lingua che non conosceva, riesce comunque a comprenderne le emozioni.

Il Concilio di Elrond è l'episodio nel quale vengono mescolati i vari linguaggi della Terra di Mezzo: se gli hobbit parlano una lingua parallela all'inglese moderno, la lingua dei nani è un richiamo all'antico norreno, mentre tutti i nomi della dinastia di Théoden derivano dall'inglese antico, e quelli degli uomini precedenti alla dinastia di Eorl dal gotico. I personaggi de *Il Signore degli Anelli* hanno la funzione di rappresentare diversi contesti linguistici, ma anche culturali. Gli uomini di Gondor si distinguono infatti dagli uomini del Mark per tradizioni e comportamenti e molte sono le analogie degli uni con gli anglosassoni e degli altri con i gallesi. Sembra quasi che Tolkien scrisse *Il Signore degli Anelli* per presentare l'Inghilterra, le sue origini, le sue lingue e i suoi abitanti.

Dietro ai numerosi intrecci della trama si muovono misteriose forze sovrannaturali. Il poeta del *Beowulf* era solito attribuire al *wyrd*, il fato, il susseguirsi degli eventi. L'equivalente norreno era l'urðr, da cui deriva il nome di una delle Norne della mitologia nordica, le tre custodi del destino. Nelle opere di Tolkien simbolo del fato sembra essere il Sentiero. Frodo, citando Bilbo, la descrive come un cammino già tracciato, lungo il quale però vi sono numerose ramificazioni. A guidare i viaggiatori lungo il sentiero sono spesso creature soprannaturali come Gandalf, inviato come messaggero dai Valar, gli dei creatori del mondo.

Sul fronte nemico si schierano invece 'ombre' e 'spettri'. La parola inglese 'shadow', 'ombra', è citata sia nel *Solomon and Saturn* come *besceadeð* che nel *Beowulf* come *sceadu.* Mentre 'wraith', 'spettro', deriva dall'inglese antico *wríðan,* 'to writhe', 'contorcersi', che ben rappresenta l'agonia degli Spettri dell'Anello.

Per combattere le forze oscure questa volta sono gli stessi hobbit, e non l'antica razza dei nani, a ricorrere al Coraggio Nordico che mai svanisce neppure nei momenti in cui le speranze crollano. I personaggi de *Il Signore degli Anelli* risultano molto più seri dei loro predecessori ne *Lo Hobbit,* così come i toni del racconto si fanno più cupi e le canzoni intonate durante la storia più epiche. Questo meccanismo probabilmente serviva ad introdurre *Il Silmarillion,* nel quale Eru Ilúvatar crea il mondo proprio cantandolo.

Il Silmarillion è un'opera postuma redatta dal figlio Christopher Tolkien. Eccetto il *Beowulf,* il testo che riscontrava maggior successo tra i racconti epici dell'Inghilterra era *Le Morte d'Arthur* di Malory, una trasposizione di storie francesi sul mito di re Artù. Tolkien desiderava invece scrivere una mitologia dedicata all'Inghilterra, che appartenesse esclusivamente della sua nazione, la quale, a causa delle invasioni normanne del 1066, aveva perso gran parte del suo patrimonio mitologico. Lo scrittore collezionò le storie de *Il Silmarillion* durante tutta la sua vita, ma a causa della sua ossessiva cura per i dettagli non riuscì mai a completare l'opera. Come poteva infatti dare profondità ad una storia che iniziava con la creazione del mondo? Tolkien pensò allora di presentare i vari racconti come scritti da persone diverse in epoche diverse; tuttavia questo stratagemma non fu mai messo in atto.

Le prime sezioni de *Il Silmarillion*, l'*Ainulindalë* e il *Valaquenta,* narrano della creazione del mondo da parte di Eru Ilúvatar e delle prime creature che lo abitarono, gli elfi. La parola inglese *elf* deriva dall'inglese antico *ælf,* correlata all'alto-tedesco *alp,* al norreno antico *álfr* e al gotico **albs*. La parola 'elfo' era ampiamente diffusa nel tempo e nello spazio: nel *Beowulf* viene usata per elencare i discendenti di Caino, *eotenas ond ylfe ond orcnéas,* giganti, elfi e orchi; nel *Sir Gawain* per descrivere il Cavaliere Verde come *aluisch mon*, 'misteriosa creatura'. In anglosassone era inoltre possibile attribuire alle

donne il termine Ælfscýne, 'bellezza elfica', mentre gli islandesi preferivano *fríð sem álfkona*, 'chiara come una donna elfica'.

Altra caratteristica di questi misteriosi esseri era la loro capacità di sedurre. Numerose sono le opere che trattano di seduzione elfica, tra cui le ballate scozzesi *Thomas the Rhymer* e *Lady Isabel*, il racconto medievale *Sir Launfal, The Wife of Bath's Tale* di Chaucer e la poesia di Goethe *Erlkönig*. Tolkien per creare i suoi elfi cercò di raccogliere ne *Il Silmarillion* tutte le leggende, dicerie, e informazioni reperibili, nel costante tentativo di creare profondità.

Se *Il Signore degli Anelli* è un calco dell'Inghilterra, *Il Silmarillion* potrebbe esser visto come calco del poema in inglese antico *Genesis B*. Essendo cattolico Tolkien non aveva intenzione di andar contro la propria fede e introdusse quindi gli umani in secondo luogo, provenienti da una regione del nord (la causa della loro diaspora non è menzionata nel testo, potendo quindi identificarla nel peccato di Adamo ed Eva). Nell'opera di Tolkien si possono intravedere anche richiami al *Early South English Legendary*, attribuito a St. Michele e risalente al 1250. Nel poema inglese vengono presentate, assieme agli angeli e ai demoni, delle creature neutrali scacciate dal Paradiso indicate come elfi.

Una domanda sorge spontanea: quale fu il loro peccato? Secondo Tolkien gli elfi peccarono di orgoglio, nell'adorare le cose create da loro più di quelle create da Eru Ilúvatar, allo stesso modo in cui nel poema anglosassone *Maxims I* la fonte del male è la metallurgia. Probabilmente Tolkien nell'ammirare i suoi racconti provava lo stesso sentimento che legava Fëanor ai suoi Silmaril; per il filologo era infatti legittimo considerare il peota del *Pearl* un gioielliere.

Assieme al *Genesis B*, anche il *Kelevala*, poema epico finlandese di Elias Lönnrot, risalente al diciannovesimo secolo, funse da ispirazione a Tolkien. Alla base del Quenya

era infatti la lingua finlandese, la quale veniva rievocata anche dai nomi di Ulmo e Iluvatar, Ilmo e Ilmatar nel *Kelevala*. Anche i Silmaril traggono spunto dal *sampo* dalla medesima opera, probabilmente simbolo della poesia. Come la distruzione del *sampo* sparse frammenti di poesia in tutta la Finlandia, Tolkien avrebbe voluto che i suoi Silmaril tramandassero le leggende dimenticate alla sua nazione.

Il *Mabinogion* scozzese, l'*Edda* di Snorri e *Sir Orfeo* furono invece alla base di alcuni episodi del racconto preferito di Tolkien, *Beren and Lúthien;* in esso il destino e la cattiva sorte sembrano governare gli eventi. La parola inglese 'fate' deriva dal latino *fari*, 'parlare', in origine riferito alle sentenze degli dei; la sorte, nella sua identificazione negativa 'doom', deriva invece dall'inglese antico *dóm*, dal verbo *déman*, 'giudicare' (*dómesdæg* definiva in inglese antico il giorno del giudizio).

Oltre a Beren e Lúthien, altro personaggio de *Il Silmarillion* vittima del destino è Túrin. Nella *Saga di Egill Skallagrímsson* in ogni generazione vi è un fratello gioioso e bello, Thorolfr, l'altro calvo e irascibile, Egill; la morte del primo scatena la natura orchesca del secondo. Allo stesso modo Túrin alla morte della sorella Lalaith, che in Sindarin significava 'riso', perde ogni segno di gioia.

Túrin morirà suicida, ucciso dalla sua stessa spada, proprio come Kullervo nel *Kalevala*. Dall'esser soprannominato Dominatore della Sorte, sull'epitaffio di Túrin verrà scritto: *Túrin Turambar turún' ambartanen*, Dominatore della Sorte, dalla sorte dominato. Inoltre, come molti personaggi dell'universo di Tolkien, Túrin è un ibrido, figlio di due stirpi differenti, il che influirà notevolmente sul suo destino (dalla madre eredita infatti l'orgoglio che lo porterà a rifiutare il perdono del suo padre adottivo, guidandolo poi verso la morte). Nelle saghe nordiche era consuetudine presentare i personaggi seguiti

dalla propria genealogia; neppure gli alberi genealogici di Tolkien sono mai casuali e perdendoli di vista si perde con loro parte della storia.

J.R.R. Tolkien ha lasciato a tutti gli autori di fantasy a lui posteriori un percorso da seguire. Proprio come dopo Cædmon altri provarono a scrivere versi sacri, dopo Tolkien molti scrittori narrarono storie di mondi e creature fantastiche. Ciò nonostante, come Bede scrisse su Cædmon nella sua *Historia ecclesiastica*, "ac nænig hwæðre him þæt gelice don ne meahte", 'nessuno di loro riuscì a farlo come lui'.

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